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## THE MODERN DILEMMA IN ART



# THE MODERN DILEMMA IN ART

The Reflections of a Color-Music  
Painter

By

I. J. BELMONT

*With 32 Plates in Halftone and Frontispiece  
in Full Color*



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BERNARD ACKERMAN  
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## P R E F A C E

A FEW MONTHS after the fateful day of Pearl Harbor I received, as did every male citizen up to sixty-five who registered for the draft, a questionnaire designed to discover my aptitudes and training for assisting the war effort. I was asked to check any trades or professions or other skills I had, and the list offered was extensive, running from doctors and engineers to carpenters and farmers. But in vain did I seek for the word "artist" or even for the name of an occupation closely related to art. They were not there. The conclusion to be drawn was inevitable. How futile was the artist — the cultured and spiritually developed artist — in the technics of human destruction. The artist appeared to be the very antithesis of the kind of manpower suitable for the prosecution of total war.

Pondering on this exclusion of the artist from industrial mobilization for war I further concluded that if man could be inoculated with the spirit of estheticism, his bellicose passions would be subdued and brought under control. Eureka! I had found in the inartistic the *Bacillus Belli*. I thereupon commenced to write a "letter to the editor" about it, but the letter grew and grew to an unpublishable length. Well, I thought, I shall make an article of it. But when I found that my thoughts were overflowing the article length, I knew I was in for it. I must write a book, which has turned out to be this book.

Nearly everyone at some time has felt the itch to write, which is sometimes called "getting something off one's chest." No doubt the following pages will reveal this itch. The reader will see that I have not attempted to give an outline history of art or tabloid biographies of artists. Much has been said by writers from Vasari to the present about the lineage of great art and all these writers have faced an insuperable problem; no matter how dynamic or erudite or eloquent the writer may be, he cannot really

describe the genius of Giotto, Leonardo, Michelangelo, Raphael, or Rembrandt, any more than you can describe the tonal spirituality or a sunset in its glory to one who has not experienced either.

What I have done is to stress the many problems of art, especially those of contemporary art. I have taken the privileges of an artist who has trod the thorny paths and who had now and then a glimpse of intoxicating and joyous horizons. I have studied and collected the Old Masters, and yes, even sold them for pecuniary gain. I have walked on the earth and my spirit has yielded to the temptations of the muses and sought flight. I have made suggestions for a better world to be achieved through the influence of the arts. Of course, I know that art is no final panacea for earthly ills but its influence is beneficent.

I have endeavored to express some of my thoughts on art and music and to illuminate the psychological and philosophical aspects of art. There is included a brief analysis of my Color-Music art, and elsewhere the reader will find some very mundane art experiences and observations. These I place, as it were, on a laden table, to be tasted, absorbed or rejected by the reader. If I have taken issue with the theories and views of some artists and their enthusiastic champions and with writers on topics related to the arts I have done so out of a sincere conviction arising from a protracted experience in art; I have not taken issue out of malice or merely fancied differences of outlook.

I do not imagine that what I have to say about Anthro-po-Eccentric Art in the pages that follow will have any effect upon those who support it. Sermons and refutations often have an opposite effect upon those to whom they are directed. It may well be that I am adding fuel to the fire of controversy about Anthro-po-Eccentric Art, and the flames will shoot up with greater intensity. Maybe this school of art will blow itself up. But most likely it will be the slow and patient action of Time that will stamp

out the fire and use the ashes as fertilizer for the new blossoms of an inspiring art.

I expect repercussions from this book, and possibly heavy artillery from some art camps will be moved up to take better aim at me. But I also expect sympathy and understanding from others. I have said a great deal about music, and this is because as a painter, music has been my inspiration and my solace. In my painting I have tried to enshrine the dream of the great Richard Wagner, the union of the arts.

Finally, let me state my indebtedness to my beloved wife Elsie, without whose encouragement and devotion to my ideals in art, this book could not have been written. Her discriminating taste in the arts is known to many. Her co-operation in the writing of this book has been inestimable, and the pleasures we both have experienced during the labors of composition will remain among the most beautiful in our memories.

I. J. BELMONT

New York, N. Y.



Part I

ATTACK ON THE "MODERNS"



## Chapter I

### MEDITATION AFTER VISITING A "MODERN ART" EXHIBIT

SOME TIME AGO I attended a war benefit party at which as a special attraction there was a showing of Nineteenth and Twentieth Century art. The pictures were principally of the type known as *Ecole de Paris*, but called by the general public "modern" or "modernistic" art. The party was "smart." The persons present were intellectual and cosmopolitan; they were up on the arts and many were in the upper income brackets.

As I stood to one side, I could see an excited young art collector explaining the genius of a Picasso abstraction to an elegantly dressed young matron. A well-known spinster of philanthropic inclinations was smiling complacently at the Modigliani portrait she had lent for the occasion. In a corner, two university professors and a prominent banker were enthusiastically appraising a piece of African sculpture of the Benin type. Nearby was a popular art critic verbally applauding a Henri ("Le Douanier") Rousseau portrait, and just beyond a refugee with a title was responding passionately to a figure grouping by Rouault.

I made my way through the crowd toward a table where what proved to be a most excellent cordial was being dispensed, but as I was reaching for refreshment, I inadvertently brushed against a rather quiet gentleman who was also reaching for a glass. We both apologized, and in that way we began our conversation. I inquired if he had also contributed a "moderne" to the show. He answered rather apologetically that he had not and added rather simply that



he did own a few pictures including a Rubens, a Tintoretto, a Perugino and a Turner. He even had a Renoir, a Monet and a few contemporary American painters. "And not one of these?" I asked, pointing to the walls with my empty glass. "No," he answered, again with a note of apology. "Perhaps," he smiled gently, "I am a back number. I simply cannot catch up to appreciating this art."

I had met men like him before, cultured persons who have acquired a pathetic "inferiority complex" because they feel they have no taste for "modern art." I looked at him. Physically, sartorially, intellectually and socially he "belonged" to the company in which I found him. He was a good judge of the excellent refreshments, he smoked a fine brand of cigarette, he enjoyed the recorded music of Beethoven's Fifth which filtered through the smoke-laden air. He was just as patriotic as the others, and like them most charitable and subscribed generously to the war relief that was the party's object. I learned later that he was a trustee of the college from which he had graduated, and was mentioned as a prospect for an important government post. Looking at his background we may well ask, why did he not appreciate "modern art" as did the other seemingly well-traveled, sophisticated and sincere people at this gallery?

And why was I, striving to be tolerant and respectful of the views and tastes of the people present, also incapable of appreciating this art? I can honestly say that nothing thrills me more than creative genius, especially in the arts. For nearly all my life I have been associated with art. From the Byzantine to Cimabue I have studied the Old Masters, and on down through the Renaissance to the present. Others have said that I have made some valuable art discoveries. Furthermore, as an artist I have been considered to be the originator of color-music in painting and may claim to have made a unique personal contribution by this form of expression. Some may think that I am entitled to an opinion.

I cannot be accused of lack of patience, for I have for

many years studied this "modern art" that emanated from France, a country whose culture and estheticism before World War II were considered to be the foremost in the world. I have read a library of books by outstanding French writers paying homage to the "modern artists" and almost divinizing them. I have seen this worship of the "modern" take root in countries nearly the world over and noted the rise of museums and organizations solely dedicated to it. I have seen the converts flock, often driven, I suspect, by an inferiority complex.

I paid special attention to these converts, studying them for many years with a mind I tried to clear of prejudice. What was the reason that people, otherwise moderate in their daily habits, even puritanically conservative, could own and enjoy a Rouault, Modigliani or Duchamps painting? These people were persons of kindness, refinement and intelligence and were very much like their contemporaries who preferred to be surrounded by a Corot or an Inness or a Renoir or even a Bouguereau.

As I walked home from this party in the early spring twilight, I revolved again in my mind what I believed was a reasonable explanation of this "modern art" enigma, and again came to the conclusion that it is useless to try to convert, censure or blast with epithets the followers of "modern art" who have sincere convictions for their particular taste in art. Invective from the conservative camp of art has not, I have noticed, affected the "modern" cult very much; on the contrary, the cult has thrived on sharp dispraise.

I shall attempt to analyze and dissect the psychological side of the "modern art" situation, but before doing so, it is necessary to fix a meaning for the word "modern" as it is bandied about today. Is there really such a thing as "modern art"? I am not here dwelling on any philosophical explanation of past, present and future; that will come in a later chapter. But it is really humorous to hear people speak of pictures that were painted during the fashion of

crinoline and bustle as "modern" simply because they are different from the academic styles we know!

A century ago Ruskin spoke of Turner as a "modern" painter. Of course Ruskin was right in considering Turner in his day a "modern," for such he was. But Ruskin's book on *Modern Painters* has come down to posterity and done its share in making Turner an Old Master. The Old Masters in their lifetimes were all considered modern. Was not Turner before his Venetian period originally influenced by the great Claude Lorraine? Or the late Monet by the pure color of Turner's Venetian period? And was not the impressionism of Edouard Manet preceded by that of Velasquez, Hals or Goya? (See Figures 1 to 4.) Even the present-day palette of some of our artists, which appears to many to be so astonishingly brilliant, is really no different from that of the artists of the Venetian or Flemish schools, Titian or Rubens. It is only a reshuffling of color combinations, together with the omission of several colors whose pigments artists have found unsatisfactory because of disintegrating tendencies. In relation to what I have just been saying, consider the canvases of Sargent, Chase, Knaus, *et al.* Who knows how in centuries to come the colors of our present-day works will look to the spectator?

I have heard it claimed for El Greco that his content was "modern," but why use the word "modern" when the best painting is timeless? Yet we have in New York the Museum of Modern Art, a name which is especially confusing since this museum exhibits examples of art executed centuries ago along with contemporary works. The museum could be called "innovative" or "experimental" or even "progressive," but surely "modern" is a misnomer for it. Haven't our contemporary *academic* artists as much right as anybody to be classed as "modern"? The asking of this question reveals at once that what people really want to imply when they use the word "modern" is this: *something different from the academic*. And indeed there are many artists today who

wish to sever any connection with the masters of the past.

This is nonsense, of course. These very predecessors whom they repudiate paved the way for them, each creative artist making his contribution to a progressive art, as in music. Monet and Seurat, for example, though not the greatest of painters were important from the scientific angle of their art, being the pioneers of the prismatic broken-color theory of painting which paved the way for others. This theory, I may observe in passing, has been helpful to color-music expression in painting; the prismatic broken colors are used to express the fugitive vibrative quality of music.

There are many genuine art lovers and connoisseurs today who seem afflicted with the burden of inferiority because they cannot understand the significance of some of our so-called "modern art." They are timorous about expressing their true feelings on this score because they have seen some highly intellectual and very sincere people prostrate themselves before the shrines of "modernism." I have often asked these fanatical worshipers why a certain much publicized "modern" painting appealed to them. Usually the answer ran like this: "I can't explain it but I feel it." Of course, from their own point of view about personal taste, this is a justifiable answer. Nevertheless, this is not an adequate answer for the reason that it will not stand the test of analysis.

Such were my thoughts as I came away from the war relief exhibition I described earlier, and now I became more convinced than ever that I was on the trail of a solution to the enigma which had perplexed me for many years. With an unprejudiced mind I have looked into the psychology of people as revealed by their outlook on art; I have attentively studied their organic and mental make-up. And I have concluded that men, so far as art is concerned, can be divided into two categories. My names for the two categories are *Anthropo-Concentric* and *Anthropo-Eccentric*. I employ these words, concentric and eccentric, in a strict scientific

sense and with due regard to their etymology. Concentric implies "tendency-with-center." Eccentric implies "tendency-out-of-center." (There is also the Anthro-Centric artist or connoisseur, but I mention him only in passing. He follows the well beaten path. He is the conservative who does not speculate outside of the firmly established in art. He is not to be confused with the academician but may represent art from Cimabue to Monet, so long as the art lies in the marketable realms.)

Both the Anthro-Concentric and the Anthro-Eccentric may be sincere, cultivated and intellectual types. They equally believe in the progress of art, but by progress they mean the growth of their ideals; they mean progress of their ways of thinking about art. The ideal of the Concentrics is infused with a tendency towards the center or central position; the ideal of the Eccentrics is imbued with a tendency out or away from the center. "Modern" or "modernistic" are words people use today to describe *eccentric* art and to distinguish it from its *concentric* progressive contemporary rival.

Nature according to her laws has disposed us into the Concentric and Eccentric types. Most of us Nature made "normal" minded and inclined toward a standardized behavior that is concentric. Nature desires that things should conform to a standardized environment, and if they are contrary, sooner or later she destroys them. If strange or freakish ideas conflict with Nature's standard schemes, Nature eventually disposes of them and rehabilitates her original plan.

Those who are Eccentric minded, drawing away from the normal, resemble the freaks or "sports" of Nature in the animal or plant kingdoms. It is evident that Nature needs some irregularity, as seen in droughts, earthquakes, freakish weather, famines and wars. By contrast with the irregular we can the more appreciate the beautiful expressions of life.

Although the two categories can be applied to the general behavior of mankind, although we can see the two types in action in religion, music, poetry, dress, wining and dining, and so on, in this essay I shall stick pretty closely to art. Let us first notice that the question of what beauty is has been decided from time immemorial again and again in favor of the Anthro-po-Concentrics, and the decision has been made by Time itself. Ours is not the first period in the world's history when the rule of the Anthro-po-Eccentric seemed established in the civilized world, although examples of the dominance of Eccentricity in art in past ages are not plentiful. This is because Time prefers Concentric creations, jealously guarding them for posterity while uprooting the weeds of Eccentricity. These weeds, however, when not fully crushed or uprooted, revive and flourish in later decades, nurtured by the over-indulgences or frustrations of humanity. It reminds one of the Mendelian theory of heredity; these weeds like the chromosomes and genes can escape many generations until finally they reappear.

It is appropriate at this point to speak of the fear of some people of criticizing Eccentric art. They are afraid to risk being condemned by the judgment of the future, thinking of the examples of Modigliani, Cézanne and Van Gogh. The last two are not in the Eccentric category; they were simply mediocre painters whose reputations were inflated by powerful posthumous publicity. To speak frankly, any disagreeable pigmentary *mishmash*, a distorted drawing, even the unintelligible scrawl of a child, anything so long as the label of some intellectual "ism" can be pinned on it, is accepted by many people with an eye to the future. Many buy such works as investments, hoping for a bullish market when they can unload these works at a good profit.

It actually seems to impede the recognition of an artist's greatness if he is understood or accepted while he is alive. It must be insisted upon that it is a fallacy to think that artists must die before they are "accepted," must not only just die

but pass away on a remote South Sea island or in an obscure and icy Montmartre garret where an astute M. Vollard<sup>1</sup> stumbles on their paintings and begins to "enlighten" the world with them. On the contrary, we know that most of the greatest artists of the world were accepted during their lifetime. Men like Titian, Holbein, Rubens, Rembrandt, Turner, Monet and Renoir certainly had their struggles, but they all lived to enjoy their fame. In the realm of music Wagner, that giant of harmony who revolutionized musical art, triumphed in his lifetime. So did Bach and Beethoven, although not without struggle. There are exceptions, of course, great artists who did not win acceptance while they were living, but the reason usually was that they did not have a talent for making themselves known to the public and had to wait for a day after their death when someone with authority placed them before the attention of the public.

To resume the thread of our discourse after this slight digression, it is almost self-evident that the majority, the Anthro-Concentrics, incline toward the harmonious, the melodious and the graceful, while the minority, the Anthro-Eccentrics, have a preference for the dissonant, the distorted, and the opposites of the objects of concentric taste. It is granted at once that dissonance in the art of painting as in music has an important and rightful place. To heighten the beauties of their harmonies, the world's greatest musicians have sprinkled their music with dissonances *but not to excess*. If the reader does not mind the comparison, dissonance by itself is an overpowering element and should be used sparingly as is a condiment in preparing a delicious dish. We can extend his comparison to an overdose of sweetness in harmony which produces acidity. An excessive amount of condiment may spoil a dish. Likewise an excessive amount of sweetness can even nauseate us. The calendar art of some of the middle and late nineteenth century painters belonging to the French, Düsseldorf and Victorian

<sup>1</sup>The French art dealer who exploited Cézanne.

schools, had this cloying saccharine quality.

Reacting against this cloying sweetness some patrons of art found relief and pleasure in drinking in with their eyes the vinegary, bitter and sharp concoctions of the Eccentric painters. These painters can be commended for their counter-action against the too sweet. They neutralized the syrupy art of their opponents but unfortunately in the end they created nothing of first rank themselves. All they accomplished was to stimulate a taste for the eccentric, thanks to publicity emanating from dealers and critics, and thus they encouraged the sprouting up everywhere of super-eccentric imitators.

By the way, it is odd but true that the Eccentric critic will almost never use the word, "vinegary," in a derogatory sense. On the other hand, he very often employs "sweet" to dismiss a picture that does not suit his eccentric temperament. The eccentric may tell you that he "likes" Raphael, Botticelli or Boucher, but it is a safe wager that he is following mob psychology in "liking" these painters who have been established for centuries, for in reality his temperament should lead him to discard these painters as antipathetic. He must experience subconscious dislike of them.

To the Concentric, Renoir's middle period is esthetically delightful. But to the Eccentric it is the closing period, the period of the clumsy nude female that Renoir painted, that is preferred. The truth is that Renoir in his dotage had nothing new to offer and succumbed to the enticement of a ride on the bandwagon of the Anthrope-Eccentrics.

Corot, that poet of the French *paysage*, is also relegated to the sugar warehouse by the Anthrope-Eccentrics. Moreover, the few portraits this painter made have been featured by some art dealers as the true source of Corot's talent. Steeping them in the scented atmosphere of the silver-toned landscapes which gave Corot his well-deserved reputation, these dealers are capitalizing on rarity-value rather than on true works of art. As a portrait painter Corot is a



second rater. As a landscape painter he is indeed the poet of the Barbizon school.

The Anthropo-Eccentric will prize an early Picasso figure-piece as proof that this artist was at one time a qualified draftsman if he wanted to be. The Anthropo-Concentric, however, is unmoved by this proof; he regards it as the product of mediocre draftsmanship and painting which Picasso himself discarded because he found himself irresistibly drawn by his instinct and innate inclination for eccentric expression. Let me repeat: in this essay I am mainly concerned with "modern art" as it is conceived by persons of eccentric temperament and taste. There are many other contemporary artists and various other "isms" in the art world that have a true creative quality and promise well for the future of art; I am not here discussing these. For the Anthropo-Concentric, fine painting like fine music is ageless and time alone is the final judge.

I have read fairly widely in psychology and biology, and the literature on eccentricity seems to me somewhat inadequate, or at least scanty in the field where I am trying to explore the meaning of eccentricity. Yes, in fiction there are many eccentric types treated, but merely superficial distinctions are often accepted. For instance, some regard a person who is careless of his dress and indifferent to sartorial fashion to be an eccentric, or a person who walks in a certain manner or eats in a certain way may be branded an eccentric. But of course such a person may be only absent-minded and not basically eccentric. He may even in his absent-mindedness be concentrating on problems that are very concentric indeed, problems vital to the welfare of humanity. A man whose necktie might be drifting toward his ear might conceivably be composing a bit of music that will be beneficial as sunshine to the race. A person disregarding traffic lights at a street crossing might be engrossed in a problem whose solution would immeasurably help mankind. Some of the most profound thinkers, philosophers and

inventors have been wrongly dubbed eccentric when in actuality they had absent-minded traits. Incidentally, absent-mindedness is common to both the Concentric and Eccentric types. Furthermore, the Eccentric may follow accurately though reluctantly standardized modes of dress and deportment though subconsciously he is rebelling against these conventions.

From the dawn of art there has been conflict between the Concentric and the Eccentric. Criticism of each by the other has not decided the issue between them, and heated words will never decide it. In the battles of critics the innocent artist often suffers the fate of the innocent bystander; he is the one who gets hurt. Should he be of concentric leanings, he gets thrown on the rubbish heap by the professional apologists for Eccentric Art, and vice versa. Some people are born with sunny dispositions, others with a tendency to take pessimistic views, and we might say the same of the Anthro-Concentrics and the Anthro-Eccentrics, they are born that way. Sometimes, however, eccentricity is developed in mature life by association with eccentric individuals; sometimes eccentricity displayed in youth evaporates with the years and the individual becomes normal and concentric. It is the old problem of heredity and acquired characteristics, innate traits and characteristics put on through mimicry of others or under the influence of propaganda.

It is most interesting to read what the naturalists have to say about eccentricity in the lower animals and even in the vegetable kingdom. Even a beanstalk, John Burroughs tells us, will sometimes show a kind of perversity that looks like the result of a deliberate choice. There is usually, he notes, a tiny minority of beanstalks that just won't climb the pole but wander off on the ground in a vagrant manner. He actually says that in some way these vagabond stalks got a wrong start in life.

I incline most strongly to the biological view of eccen-

tricity; I plump for heredity as the chief determinant, not ever forgetting the importance of environmental associations, of why certain individuals are pronouncedly different from others in their art outlook. Certainly I do not agree with the Freudian theory of mental abnormality and the heavy emphasis it places on repressed ideas and suppressed feelings. Ideas cannot be repressed. Consider Tsarist Russia, which was industrially an undeveloped country. But ideas flourished there in the latter part of the nineteenth century, producing a great literature, great music, notable art and philosophy. Adler, the ex-disciple of Freud, gives a better explanation for a period of industrial backwardness which bursts into creative fulfilment in other forms of culture. He calls it compensation for weakness in one sphere. Adler, in fact, believed that the first response to life one makes is a sense of weakness. Illustrations confirming Adler's theory of compensation for organic inferiority can be multiplied from the animal kingdom, whereas Freud's theory of dreams has suffered greatly from scientific criticism. However, I draw back from this little excursion into psychological theory since my main-interest is the development of art and the clarification of questions concerning it.

In the animal kingdom there is often observed a strange reaction when animals meet with exotic specimens of their own species. For example, I once observed in Central Park a canary bird perched on the branch of a tree. Somehow this bird had escaped from its cage in a nearby apartment house and was now taking refuge among the leaves. Presently it took flight from the tree and was followed by a flock of sparrows that began attacking it. Why? I presume because this strange bird of canary color was foreign to them and not of their kind. Then again I have seen moths flying around that resemble in shape little butterflies, and I have seen birds attack these moths as if under a command of nature. But strange to say, these same birds will not attack the true butterflies. It takes a long time, as John Burroughs

has pointed out, for birds, horses and other animals to learn to solve the problems of adjustment to surroundings created by civilized man.

There are endless ramifications of this theme of eccentricity. In love the eccentric is frequently classified as abnormal according to standard human behavior. In literature there are today many writers who inject into their works the eccentricities of their personalities—the most celebrated example is Gertrude Stein, who also admires Eccentric painters—and these writers attract an eccentric public. Fashions in dress may be often irrational, but even so there are eccentric dressers who devote themselves to achieving very conflicting angles in their garb in order to be as different as possible from the prevailing concentric taste in clothes. As an example, we have at this moment the "zoot suit," a sensational bit of apparel that has even drawn editorial comment. The inspiration for this "zoot suit" was a creation of a tailor who designed a man's suit of loose drapery and exaggerated proportions. This "smart" departure appealed to some professional men of Hollywood and particularly leaders of "swing" orchestras. These men embraced this fashion as a spree, or temporary diversion, natural with human beings, from which they would emerge in due time to standard taste. This bit of sartorial eccentricity inspired the mob, who like savages excited by the jungle tom-tom, or who like their "civilized" counterparts, the "swing" addicts and contortionists, began to "improve" this original exaggeration by increased distortions. These sartorial hyper-distortions are nothing else but an exhibition of repressed desires and emotions, a symbol of gratification of a people who have nothing else to offer. What a parallel for the present-day Anthro-po-Eccentric art distortionists!

Another ramification leads us to anti-Semitism or any other race hatred. How is anti-Semitism to be explained in terms of my general theory? First, note that children are born into this world some of whom have a hereditary

tendency of antipathy toward certain things. This may seem a startling statement to the psychologist who maintains the thought that environment is the most important factor influencing behavior. I, too, concur in the idea of the vast importance of environmental influences. I may say that I do believe in the interaction between the hereditary traits and the environment. But in the final analysis, psychology, like science and philosophy, is subject to change. To go back, these children have a limited amount of reasoning power and begin life with a general capacity for acquiring prejudices. Perhaps the child's forebears were misanthropic, sadistic, or anti-Semitic. In my opinion, this tendency to general prejudice is inherited and makes the child susceptible to off-center or eccentric propaganda directed against other people. I do not say that people are born anti-Semitic but, having inherited a general tendency to hate, through biological or environmental influences, easily become prejudiced toward certain races they are propagandized into hating. Had there never been Jews in the world, some other group would have been selected to be the scapegoats and victims of prejudices.

But you say, among some very well educated and talented people there is a tendency toward anti-Semitism or other perversion of personal dislikes. Yes, but we must reflect that an educated person's moral point of view is not always sound and does not always reveal integrity of character. By using his education in wrong channels he may indeed become dangerous to concentric thought precisely because of his superior education. Education is a magical key in the hands of persons of high moral bearing, but the individual with eccentric morals and ethics might be much less harmful if he had not been educated. Furthermore, it must be admitted that some of the most concentric people in table manners, politeness and talents of one kind or another may be off-center in morals and ethics. The subject is complex and

in later essays in this book I shall attempt to explore it thoroughly.

By way of completing this preliminary survey, let me note that there is also the bogus eccentric who knows he is a sham but cynically dons the cloak of eccentricity in art or logic to further his material ends. Then there is the perennial eccentric who fluctuates with the whirligig of time. He is a mild unstable form; his mind is a will-o'-the-wisp.

It may seem that Kant's explanation of beauty as a product of behavior might have bearing on our discussion. But I cannot agree with the Kantians. Beauty is an artistic achievement and perception is its most vital part. We cannot perceive without looking at the object. First the eyes observe then report to the mind which perceives beauty. When art is spoken of as faultless, it can be in a relative sense only. Faultlessness is humanly impossible. We are not perfect in art or any other achievement, although we can approach perfection. There is a relativity of beauty; what is beautiful to some eyes is not to others. But Kant is correct in the main drift of his remark that beauty is a product of behavior, though the considerations I have just adduced must be taken into account; we do possess idiosyncrasies of taste as witness the Anthrope-Eccentrics.

Eccentricity may seem to dominate the world at one time or another, in one field or another, but eccentricity has no solid foundation. Its innovators and camp-followers cannot survive. All they do is to leave behind an arid field which concentricity has to make fertile again, and that, alas, is often a slow process.

The reader may think that I have come a long way from the chance encounter with the gentleman who was unappreciative of "modern art" that started me off on this meditation, but I can assure him that the subject is a fruitful one not for just one essay but for at least several.

## Chapter II

### ECCENTRICITY IN ART

I AM WRITING this book in the fourth year of the Second World War. Despite their setbacks, the United Nations are not in despair but are viewing the future with great hope. And in the arts likewise it is not the hour for despondency but for cheerful hope of a great future flowering of esthetic genius. After the First World War there was an outburst of frustrated art, and we can attribute this in part to the frustration of our fight to "make the world safe for democracy." This time the blood shed on the banks of the Don and on the sands of Africa or Guadalcanal will not be in vain but will be a sacrifice for the further development of democracy and brotherhood. Who knows but through the attainment of a fuller democracy we shall attain the conditions for the growth of an art so ideal as to be perhaps comparable to that of the ancient Greeks. Art after the Second World War we hope will be strikingly different from the Anthropeo-Eccentric art that followed the armistice of 1918.

But is there no good in Eccentric art whatsoever, I can imagine a reader asking. I have not said there is nothing good in it; I wish only to establish a certain attitude toward it, an attitude that puts this art in its proper place in a well balanced life. Eccentric art, for example, is sometimes quite amusing. A concentric person enjoys a dip into it from time to time for amusement's sake. It is normal to relish a spree into the ridiculous and the humorous, after which the concentric reverts to a normal point of view. Variety is the spice of life, runs the old proverb, and human nature craves change now and then.

Yes, just for the fun of it, normal human beings occasionally indulge in eccentricities as a stimulant like a vacation to their more serious and dignified occupations. Eccentricity is a part of human nature and has existed from early man, but with the normal person these bouts of eccentricity are of short duration.

But the eccentricity that flourished after the First World War had something unhealthy about it. It was born of an extreme, the prosperity of what was called the Jazz Age. I remember one season in Florida during this boom period when the sons of prominent tycoons wintering at Palm Beach took to dashing around not in Rolls-Royce cars but in battered old jalopies. They left the expensive car standing in the garage and sported about in old cheap models. It was a reaction against so much opulence. These lads were tired of prosperity, jaded with luxury.

Those were the days of Prohibition. A young relative of mine gave a party for his friends of college age at which I noticed that a young lady was getting close to the limit of her capacity for bootleg liquor. As she seemed ready to "pass out," I went over to her and asked if I could make her more comfortable. My nephew, overhearing my solicitousness, called me aside and chided me for my lack of taste in disgracing the young lady by calling attention to her inability to "hold her liquor." Little did my nephew realize that had he been born a little earlier and had this incident occurred at a party in, say, 1912, he himself would have had this young lady ostracized from good society for an exhibition of lack of self-control. This was the type of eccentricity that some people have blamed on the Versailles peace. We might note that eccentricity can be born of either hard times or of prosperous times, if such times are extreme. Victorian prosperity gave us art marked by ungainly proportions and dripping with excessive sweetness and sentimentality.

Eccentricity in small doses as a spree is one thing.



Eccentricity in large doses is something else and demands most serious analysis. As an antidote against it we should keep certain definitions very clearly in mind. First, esthetics, which according to the dictionary is the science or doctrine of the nature of beauty and of the judgments of taste. It is the branch of the investigation and knowledge that treats of the fine arts and of art criticism. Esthetic then would mean pertaining to beauty, taste or the fine arts. The science of the nature of beauty—the esthetic imagination, of course, differs from the scientific imagination—must deal squarely with this whole question of concentric and eccentric taste, so it is well we fix basic meanings for those terms in our minds. Turning again to the dictionary, we find concentric defined as “having a common center as spheres or circles, said loosely of any curves that are parallel or nearly so.” And eccentricity, the dictionary says, is “the state or quality of being *strikingly different* from one’s fellows in one or more particulars, as eccentric taste, disposition or action”! (My italics.)

My object in these essays is to persuade the public to see certain types of art as Anthropeo-Eccentric art. The failure to perceive the eccentricity in so-called “modern art” is a great barrier to the concentric artists of our period. Art suffers today not from modernity but from anthropeo-eccentricity (the quality of being strikingly different from the norm).

Whom shall we take as the leading champion of the Eccentric artists? A great many people would pick R. H. Wilenski, the English art writer, so Wilenski let it be. Wilenski, who performs the remarkable feat of admiring both Raphael and Rouault, really wants to undo what has been accomplished by the greatest masters. To still his conscience in his self-appointed task of destruction, he brings forward a concept of “architectural form” that is meaningless and nonsensical. Wilenski does not understand that there is a world of difference between exaggerated form and

distortion. An artist may exaggerate his form so as to make it more attractive but the enhancement is not procured by relying on distortion alone.

There are as a matter of fact two kinds of distortion. One has beautiful lines and curves and is executed with a delicate touch, the other is simply crude and results from poor craftsmanship. It is obvious that we need another word to describe the first kind which is more a re-arrangement than a distortion. In regard to distortions that are ugly, we need to ask only one simple little question: if distortions are resorted to for the sake of improvement why make them appear ugly?

In his book on *Modern French Painters* Wilenski names a number of types of distortion, to wit, religious distortions, romantic distortions, architectural distortions and fashionable distortions. The reply to all this subdividing of distortion is simply this: if distortions are exaggerated, they become ghastly and ugly, but if esthetic emphasis is actually improved by exaggeration, why call the exaggeration a distortion? We need, as I said above, another word to name the beautiful "distortion."

Wilenski speaks of religious distortion, yet none of the greatest artists used distortions to enhance the figure of Christ. They enhanced the figure all right but not by distortion in any accepted sense of the word. Look, for instance, at Rubens' *Descent from the Cross* (also Rembrandt's) and see how the figure of Christ stands out while the surrounding figures are dimmed. (See Figures 5 and 6.) Here is emphasis but not via distortion. El Greco, on the other hand, whose art has been given great plaudits since the rising of the "modern" movement, did use distortion, not for enhancement as Wilenski claims, but simply because he was accused of imitating Titian or Tintoretto who were greater artists than El Greco. How did Tintoretto and Titian paint their Christ? Certainly not with distortions.

One further word about El Greco. He was not so well

known as Titian or Tintoretto, and it has been only recently that he has been canonized by the worshipping Anthropeccentric distortionists who endeavor to elevate him above the other old masters. Of El Greco, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* says: "He was haughtily certain of the value of his own art, and was determined to paint in cold, ashen coloring with livid, startling effect"—and then speaks of "the gaunt and extraordinary figures that he beheld with his eccentric genius." The *Britannica's* application of "eccentric" is not quite as I define it in this book. As I have already mentioned, El Greco had a reason for his distortions.

In an earlier essay I indicated the very moderate esteem in which I held the theory of Freud, but it is interesting to note that some distortions are much like the results of repressed emotions in dreams interpreted by Freudian analysts.

Now for something entertaining about Wilenski. I refer to his curious use of the word "degenerate." This champion of his own idiosyncratic temperament actually applies the word "degenerate" to some of the great artists of the past who do not meet his eccentric taste! If Wilenski does not like a great artist, it is very simple for him; he just calls him "degenerate."

Thanks to the Eccentrics, there has been a great vogue in our time for African art (Ivory Coast, etc.). It may be asked why, if we are a civilized race, we should turn to primitive Negro art, and it may be further asked, how can we compare this Negroid art to the work of the great masters? In saying this, I mean no disrespect to the civilized Negroes of today. African art stems from people who were almost barbaric and worshiped cruel gods, the deities of ignorance. At the same time in Asia the Chinese and other races were producing very great art. The deities of great enlightened cultures have inspired great art but this does not hold for the African gods. If I may be pardoned

a blunt popular expression, the cult for African art is "hokum."

At the same time that the Eccentrics of our period were going in for primitive Negro art, they were also raving about Dadaism and its successors. This raving can be traced back to 1912 when Marcel Duchamps, who later became one of the favorites of the Dadaists, exhibited his famous painting, *Nude Descending a Staircase*. Because the Dadaists, the Fauves and other iconoclastic cults yearned to blaze a new trail for art, they indulged in infantile revolutionary methods. Completely opposed to the Bouguereau-Graeco-Roman painters, they cried and stamped their feet and shouted like angry children. They could not be the Raphaels, Rembrandts and Turners of our period, so they sulked and determined to force on us different ideas of art. They went in heavily for Negroid primitivism, cubism, dadaism, any ism that had shock value since the beginning of our century. One thing the noise of these children did accomplish for us; it drew attention to new and different things in architecture, furniture, ceramics, fabrics and so forth. That is as it should be. But the many creations of these artists and craftsmen, while they are different, lack the great rhythms and imaginative sweep of past creations. Yet they were forced upon us by "modern art" exponents, and out with our Botticellis and Chippendale bookcases! This "modernist" trend was as silly as the period trend in interior decoration to which I devote a later essay.

One thing we can certainly say with truth: art cannot be forced. Geniuses are not made to order, but genius bloweth as it listeth. Here, I would like to say that the understanding of the term genius, which is important in art as well as in other fields, may be explained in the light of my theory of Anthro-Concentricity and Anthro-Eccentricity. The genius deviates from the normal in so far as he is "super-normal," even though away from the center. However, in art, or in any other field of endeavor, we must not

confuse the Anthro-po-Eccentric with the genius of beneficial creation, for they are at different extremes. I just mention this, realizing that genius is a complex subject and I leave it to the psychologist of the future for solution. Sometimes geniuses appear singly over a long stretch of time, at other times they come in clusters like a path of four-leaf clovers when you are least looking for them. Let us not be impatient if no landscapist as profound in imagination has appeared since Turner or Corot or no great cabinet maker since Chippendale or even no great architect such as those of ancient Greece. If we have waited twenty-five hundred years for beautiful architecture equal to the Greeks, we can be patient a little longer.

As the saying goes, the Greeks had a word for it, and that was the word "esthetic" whose Greek meaning was "fit to be perceived." Esthetic designates that which is adequate to the requirements of what philosophers call perception; it means appealing to the mind through the senses or organs and giving satisfactory and agreeable perceptions which we call beautiful. A taste for the beautiful can be developed, and a concentric education aims to perfect one's natural refinement. Eccentrics, to make another distinction between them and the Concentrics, may possess artificial refinement but not natural refinement. An example of natural refinement is the painter Millet. He found something good and great in the peasantry and showed their harmony with Nature.

If only the Eccentrics would part with some of their isms, the situation would be clarified. The so-called "modern movement" has developed since 1885 but as a matter of fact the Eccentrics can be traced from the Byzantine period up to the Renaissance and to the present day. Indeed, we can find eccentricity even earlier. Right now we are naturally more concerned with the Eccentric art produced in our age.

Once more I would like to make it clear that I view the

Anthropo-Eccentrics as a product of the times. People like change in art now and then as well as in other departments of life, and over-indulgence in estheticism brings on a reaction. Speaking of Millet, as I was a moment ago, he has been accused of "mushiness," but the esthetic sentiments of man toward his brother man should not be so stigmatized. A person sentimental about brotherhood is of real value. I am not against any ism in art. On the contrary, I say, let us encourage any artist who has a real message to offer. But let us discourage the Anthropo-Eccentrics *en masse*. It is not modernity and isms that art today suffers from; it is eccentricity that is culpable. Some self-deluded Eccentric artists are real fanatics and one feels that like the religious fanatics they too would sacrifice their lives. Fanaticism alone does not improve art, yet fanaticism in religion heightened the art of some medieval painters, including Fra Angelico and others.

We must remember that some of us like to be shocked now and then, and the Eccentric knows that well. It is sometimes amusing to be shocked. What is not so often remarked is that it is the most refined people who most enjoy the thrill of a shock in art or other things. The vulgar tend to a shock-proof condition and Eccentric art, et cetera, produces less effect upon them.

For almost a quarter of a century now the Führer of Irrationalism in art, the Eccentric, has been in the saddle. Having no logical program, he must fall eventually, as we know. But in the meantime he has won the zealous devotion of his minority following and of dealers and pseudo-esthetes who climb on the bandwagon and follow anyone for the sake of monetary gain. The Concentrics have been pushed to the wall and their protests seemingly have availed little. Some keep quiet altogether, being afraid to express an opinion lest some party member of the Eccentrics might find them subversive. I hope that my essays will give such people courage to speak up. Others have resigned themselves to

waiting merely for the time and events that will bring the world back to normal. The same situation obtains in "modern" music, "modern" dancing and "modern" poetry.

Let us affirm the truth as we know it. An abstract form does not have to be derived only from an object. It does not have to come from distorted objects but can come from the imagining of idealized concepts.

The thing that should stiffen the backbone of the Concentric today is a recollection of his duty to posterity. A thousand years from now, we will be judged by the Negroid art influences we liked, by the works of Rouault, Rousseau, Modigliani, and the rest; we will be judged to have been a semi-barbaric people, unless we succeed in purifying our taste and in recovering Concentric standards. It is better for us to weed out the wilder growth of Eccentric art now. Posterity will think of our great wars and our Eccentric art and conclude that we were half barbaric. The hour has struck to reassert Anthro-po-Concentric values.

## Chapter III

### THE PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH TO ECCENTRICITY

OTHERS besides myself, I am happy to note, have been attacking the problem of eccentricity in art, and the question was lately discussed from a scientific point of view by the science editor of a large newspaper chain. In the *New York World-Telegram* for November 13, 1942, David Dietz, the Scripps-Howard Science Editor, wrote an article on the subject of differences in taste, and began by asking: "Why does one person like modernistic paintings and another despise them? Why does one person go for bright color combinations while another prefers neutral hues?"

Mr. Dietz then brought forward a professor to answer these interesting questions. "It's all 'neurobiophysical,' according to Dr. Nicholas Rashevsky, associate professor of mathematical biophysics at the University of Chicago. . . . Why are certain color combinations, geometric shapes, sounds, etc., more pleasant than others? . . . Professor Rashevsky attempts to explain it on the basis of the functioning of the nervous system."

According to Dr. Rashevsky's findings, individuals with very high nerve thresholds of both excitation and inhibition will enjoy much higher intensities; in other words, much more pronounced contrasts in shade or color. On the other hand, individuals with a very low inhibitory threshold will either prefer very simple patterns or like complex patterns with extremely vague contrasts. Similar considerations may hold about sound patterns. High thresholds of inhibiting fibers, Dr. Rashevsky adds, would result in the preferences of strong, harsh, and sudden sound combinations.



Dr. Rashevsky has come at the problem from the scientific or laboratory point of view; I come at it from my experience with the arts, which alters somewhat the conclusions of Dr. Rashevsky. If, for example, we are going to talk about responses to bright color combinations and the rest of it, we have to realize that such colors are not confined to "modern" paintings alone. There have been painters in the past—Titian, Rubens, Ziem, and Monticelli, to name a few—who have used some colors that were not only bright but even flamboyant. Yet they are put in the discard by "modern art" lovers in spite of their color because they do not have enough distortion in their combinations to suit Eccentric taste. On the other hand, there are many "modern" painters who employ the more subdued colors on their canvases, but these subdued colors are so placed and so eccentrically composed that they appeal to the "modern art" enthusiast. We may make a similar point about sound in "modern" music. Please note that we have the *fortissimo* sounds in Wagner, Richard Strauss, and Shostakovitch and the identical intensity of sound volume in our jazz and "modern" composers. It is not the intensity of loudness or brightness, nor the softness nor subdued color qualities that is the decisive factor, as a scientist untrained in art or music might conclude. It is a question of pigmentary or sound composition, a question of the total arrangement, that is decisive.

Reviewing my own experiences with the two main types of art lovers, I do not discover confirmation of Dr. Rashevsky's contention that people with very high thresholds both of excitation and inhibition enjoy as a rule the higher intensities of color and sound. I confess to a strong doubt that the reactions of the nervous system can be reduced to a mathematical formula. I am sure that inhibitions do not invariably imply preference for intensities and excitations. In many instances, it is the reverse so far as taste in "modern" art or "modern" music is concerned. Consider

the music of the Russian and some of the Balkan peoples who have led inhibited lives for generations. Most of their music is in the minor key, which I can compare to subdued colors like blues, purples, blacks, and greens. These peoples, as a rule, do not seem to go for the flamboyant major colors, the reds, the yellows, and the oranges. But occasionally for a short while the mantle of repression slips from them when they embrace the major colors, and then they naturally revert to the minors. One can find these moods in their songs. That Dr. Rashevsky is publicly trying to find the answer to Eccentric taste is all to the good. I remain convinced that fundamentally it is a matter of hereditary and environmental leanings toward the Anthro-Concentric and the Anthro-Eccentric.

Well, what can we learn from the professional psychologists that will enable us to explain the Eccentrics better?

Gardner Murphy in *A Briefer General Psychology* states that all the theories of personality reckon with conflict between motives and all stress the necessity of grasping personality as a whole. He pays particular attention to the psychology of sight and explanations of color-blindness, of which there are many kinds and degrees. After considering these matters, Murphy declares that psychology needs a theory to account for the psychological uniqueness of yellow which he says certainly does not seem like a mixture of red and green. Psychology also needs a theory about white, which is the resultant of a mixture of all wave lengths, yet does not seem to be simply the sum of all colors. The painter should follow such detailed researches with keen interest, for they may in the end tell him more about Concentric and Eccentric taste.

Joseph Jastrow in *Keeping Mentally Fit* describes numerous experiments about why people and animals veer in a circle when they have lost their way. The experiments in every instance confirmed the popular belief that a lost person does go around in a circle although he thinks he is

moving in a straight line. The connection between this circular tendency and man's esthetic responses to circles and other shapes is of course obscure, but it is worth filing this fact away in the mind in our efforts to probe deeper into the meaning of esthetics.

One psychologist, Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, has exercised a great influence upon the Eccentrics, especially upon the Dadaists, who claimed to be exemplifying Freud's theory of the unconscious and of dreams in their works. Freud did not have anything personally to do with the Dadaist movement, and his idea of the beautiful was very different, but they claimed him as godfather. As I have indicated elsewhere, I do not think the Freudian theory gives us a profound interpretation of Eccentricity. "The child," said Freud, "is naturally polymorphous perverse." In commenting on this statement, Everett Dean Martin said that it meant that the psycho-sexual life of the child differs from that of the normal adult in that it is not attached to the same love objects as it is with the normal person. This is something to bear in mind when confronted by the child art cult which the Dadaists and many others in our time fostered.

For light on the Gestalt school of psychology I turned to Woodworth, who points out that the Gestalt theorists do not like the stimulus-response conception so dear to the Behaviorists and reject the chain-of-reflexes notion associated with Herbert Spencer. The Gestalt people think in terms of a whole pattern or "configuration." I do not believe that the Gestalt school has a satisfactory explanation of the multiple personality. Is it a functional disorder? Pierre Janet and others have so considered it, but there are assuredly some normal people who possess three or four distinct personalities.

In H. L. Hollingworth's *Mental Growth and Decline*, Herbert Spencer's formula of development is given, namely, "a change from an indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to a

definite, coherent heterogeneity through continuous differentiations and integrations." There is the suggestion here of a psychological law that might be applied to the understanding of Eccentricity.

On the whole, though, I do not find the professional psychologists any too helpful on the topic of Eccentricity in art. As the reader can see from the foregoing extracts, the psychologists give us sidelights on Eccentricity rather than flooding the subject directly with light. A sensible remark is that made by Dr. H. L. Hollingworth in his preface to *The Sense of Taste*, in which he says that "the sense of taste is in numerous ways the most paradoxical of all the senses. Although as a source of sense impressions it can afford the keenest immediate feelings, pleasure and delight, the books on esthetics and art have little or nothing to say about it." This is a defect that I hope in time to do my share to remedy.

The psychologists do, however, give us a big mouth-filling word to throw at exhibitions of Eccentric taste. The word is *allotriogeusia*. It means perversion of the sense of taste.

I return to my original position. Anthrope-Eccentricity is mainly due to heredity stimulated by an environment that favors Eccentric taste. As C. L. Redfield, a writer on heredity, has said, "Characters which are ordinarily transmitted from generation to generation sometimes disappear in the child or reappear in the grandchild, the great-grandchild, or even some remote descendant."

For my part, I hazard the speculation that the thyroid or pituitary gland has something to do with Eccentricity. Perhaps Eccentricity is closely connected with the pituitary gland, that tiny kernel secreted beneath the brain which is the controlling influence on the body, determining for instance, height and weight and other natural characteristics. My thinking, as the reader has by now observed, tends to fall

back upon a biological or a hereditary position buttressed by the Mendelian theory when it comes to answering the question, why are certain people eccentric?

## Chapter IV

### A REJOINDER TO CERTAIN CHAMPIONS OF ECCENTRICITY

A WRITER on English eccentric persons resurrected a remark of Jonathan Swift's that sheds some light on what is wrong with the more extreme forms of eccentricity in art in our time. "A little grain of romance," said Swift, "is no ill ingredient to preserve and exalt the dignity of human nature, without which it is apt to degenerate into everything that is sordid and vicious and low." Now the Eccentric lacks this "little grain of romance," this saving grace of idealism, and the result is that he lacks a sense of proportion and balance. The dignity of human nature is a central conception, a concentric influence. If one hasn't a lively sense of it, one flies out from or away from the center. One may stop short of "the sordid and vicious and low"; indeed some persons may be eccentric only in certain directions, and in the special field that that person is most seriously involved in—art, music, or science—that person may indeed be concentric. But we must recognize that the "all-out" eccentrics of the past have reached some pretty low levels. Lecky tells us about the gladiatorial games of the Romans, saying that they destroyed all sense of disgust and therefore all refinement of taste. This made the drama impossible to continue. In the gladiatorial games of the Roman Empire I see eccentricity running riot.

I do not imply by the foregoing that such champions of Anthro-Eccentricity as Mr. James Johnson Sweeney of the Museum of Modern Art and Mr. Sam A. Lewisohn, one of the Museum's supporters, are defenders of the cruelties

and obscenities of the old Roman games; they are among those who stop considerably short of the extremes of eccentricity. Mr. Sweeney specifically champions the ancient aboriginal African art of Benin, that strip of British West Africa and its environs which the Portuguese were the first to reach. For a decade or more there has been a movement to appreciate this art of a semi-barbaric people, and the archaeological appeal of it has been exploited. Let Mr. Sweeney speak for it.

He says that the art of Negro Africa has won a place of respect, that its genuine merits are now recognized. All of us can be glad that a tendency to overlook Negro achievements is gone. He thinks that the early work of Picasso, Modigliani and of Cézanne's researches are to be credited with opening European eyes to the qualities of African art.

Well, I say to Mr. Sweeney by way of rejoinder, are we to understand that these African endeavors are esthetically valuable from a universal point of view? Do you seriously mean that they can be compared with Chinese art or with European artists who were contemporary with these Negro artists? The answer to these questions is obviously no. If we accept these African endeavors as art, then our civilization must accept with them the vulgarities and brutalities of these savage people. Is not art an expression of a civilization? (See Figures 7 and 8.) Look at a piece of Chinese porcelain of the Ming'period, and one can perceive in it the culture and philosophy of a great people. Most of this Benin art is aboriginal and expressive of a quite limited culture. The best part of it, a very small amount, was directly influenced by the Portuguese who discovered the country in the fifteenth century. This art, it is no exaggeration to say, should be relegated to a museum of natural history or else regarded only as a curiosity if admitted into a home. Mr. Sweeney does not appear to realize in just what light he is putting Cézanne, Picasso and Modigliani (shouldn't we add Rouault to this trio?) when he credits

them with opening European sensibilities to Benin art. He is practically saying that these artists are not original at all but only offshoots of Beninism, *and therefore certainly cannot be called modern.*

The mention of Rouault reminds me again of Mr. Lewisohn, a foremost citizen of New York whose philanthropies have put the whole community in his debt, but who is an ardent champion of Rouault. In an article Mr. Lewisohn once wrote about this painter he dubbed him "Master of Dissonance." What does he mean by this? If this master is completely dissonant in his works, they cannot be harmonious, and overwhelming dissonance is as disagreeable to the eyes as to the ear. As I have remarked elsewhere, dissonance should be only an ingredient, a sort of condiment in a composition. In music Wagner blended his dissonances into highly harmonious composition making use of the seventh and other dissonant chords. But whatever Mr. Lewisohn means, the fact is that Rouault is completely dissonant. (See Figures 9 and 10.)

To speak the harsh truth, Rouault to me is no more than an artist of limited development. The most we can say for him is that he gives a sincere expression of Anthrope-Eccentricity derived from pure African art. What about his "stained glass quality" and his "vibrant musical quality" that the propagandizing dealers and critics rave about? To me they are no more than the qualities of a Punch and Judy show. His "musical vibrations" are as static as a pyramid in the desert. The "jeweled colors" rank with contributions that kindergarten children make with colored chalk scratching on the blackboard. It is really inconceivable how Mr. Lewisohn and others can ecstatically compare Rouault to some of the Old Masters. Mr. Lewisohn may be temporarily under the influence of the propaganda of someone of pronounced Eccentric make-up. If so, let us hope that he de-mesmerizes himself in time. It would be unfair to Mr. Lewisohn and his deceased father not to add a word of



gratitude for giving to all of us the opportunity, nay, rather the luxury, of listening to the music of the immortals under the stars of the summer evening sky at the famous Lewisohn Stadium in New York. How Mr. Lewisohn can sponsor the profundities of Wagner, Brahms or Beethoven or the fine spirituality of Debussy, and then turn around and embrace Rouault as a painter of pigmentary musical vibrations borders on the incomprehensible. As has been said, "A little nonsense now and then is relished by the wisest men."

There has been not only a craze for primitive African art but we have also been treated to a craze for "primitive" American art. Some interior decorators have assisted in whooping up this vogue, and American "primitive" art has been cornered by a few dealers who are unloading it profitably on a simple-minded public as "unusual art." The unvarnished truth is that many of these pictures were executed by itinerant amateurs who hadn't the slightest knowledge of the rudiments of art. Much of it was executed in the William McKinley period, but no matter, it's palmed off as "Early Americana," if you please. Surely those finished polished artists of the eighteenth century, Copley, Stuart and the rest, must be turning in their graves at this sacrilege. Like the African examples, these examples of "Early Americana" should be viewed strictly as curiosities.

No rejoinder to champions of Eccentricity can possibly overlook Wilenski, so let us spend a few moments in his company once again. This critic poses a "thrill" problem but he is not quite explicit about it. Some Concentrics might be both shocked and thrilled when viewing an Eccentric with its distortions and barbaric expression. But there is another and nobler sense of the word "thrill." There is the noble thrill that comes from absorbing a great masterpiece of art. We call that thrill the thrill of inspiration. I dare say that Wilenski wishes to evade discussion of that inspiring thrill. Wilenski attacks the pseudo-classical standards of some nineteenth century French painting, and he coins an interesting

expression for these pseudo-classical artists; he calls them "Wardour Street Graeco-Roman confectioners." But he has drawn the wrong conclusion: there was too much sweetness in such painters. The natural reaction took place and a part of the art public demanded the sour or extremely bitter. But by the law of reaction we may expect public taste to return after this extreme to a desire for the normal.

Wilenski makes much of distortion in El Greco, he finds it among the Greeks, giving in evidence the broken snub noses and wrinkled brows of satyrs, and he speaks of Fra Angelico's "deliberately dehumanized angels." To all this one must firmly repeat that there is a profound difference between a distortion and an exaggeration, that distortion regardless of the painter's purpose is not attractive per se, and that Signorelli, whom Wilenski also claims as a distortionist, does not distort much in the Wilenski sense. Even assuming that some of the older artists used distortions, which would show that distortion is not modern, is there any reason why we should engage in nonsensical imitation of them?

Enough of Wilenski for the time being. Let me now break a lance against Lionello Venturi. One of his arguments runs as follows: citing El Greco and Modigliani, he asserts that they were not optimistic about human nature and did not make a fetish of human proportions. They overthrew the theory of proportions and painted out of their own mode of feeling. I say in rejoinder that it is silly to link El Greco and Modigliani. Whatever may be said against El Gr co he had a strain of genius in him and some logic for the elongation of his figures whereas Modigliani is pure Anthrope-Eccentricity and nothing else, and is merely bait put out by clever art dealers.

Venturi also tries to take Lessing to task for alleged contradictions in his theory of the ugly. In this he is unsuccessful. If one understands by ugliness in art the selection of humble unattractive types and surrounding them

with spirituality, as Millet did with his peasantry, then we can understand and agree with Aristotle's well-known dictum, namely, that even an ugly figure may please us if reproduced in painting. But simply to paint an ugly object without any transfiguration by emotion is to waste energy. Lessing's view is correct: we do have the faculty of abstracting our enjoyment of the painter's art from the ugliness of the object represented.

Readers who keep up with the apologists for Eccentricity will expect me to say something about Alfred Barr's book, *Cubism and Abstract Art*, and I shall not overlook this author's elucidation of Dadaism and Futurism, the latter arising in Italy to express the power of the machine age. Barr says the Futurists set out to "destroy the materiality of objects" by using brilliant color applied with small strokes of the brush, and he adds that they tried to embody a principle of simultaneity. This produced the absurd reasoning that a running horse should have not four but twenty legs. This however was not truly dynamic expression. Vibrating pigmentary effects help the human vision to see and feel running horses quite well even if they have only the customary four legs.

Barr truly says that Dadaism "was born of skepticism, disillusion, cynicism and nourished by war, peace and inflation." The Dadaists scoffed at all standards, mocked at both conservatism and at people who thought they were "advanced."

Marcel Duchamps' *Nude Descending a Staircase* comes in for special explanation by Barr. This figure in motion is presented in a series of twenty or more aspects. According to Barr, Duchamps here solves a problem which had been attacked but not solved a little earlier by the Italian Futurists. (In a still, small voice I would like to ask, is a great painting a sort of puzzle?) For myself I permit a doubt that even if the picture is pieced together as Barr suggests, it would give us a nude descending a staircase. I

do not mind giving the flat judgment that the picture is a piece of sensational propaganda in nonsensical form.

It is against such exponents of the Eccentric as I have here applied to, that the champions of common sense, of the Concentric view, must tilt. Fortunately the champions of sanity are now entering the lists, and I cannot close this essay better than by quoting the eminently sane observation of Professor Albert R. Chandler in his book, *Beauty and Human Nature*.

"We may well recognize that painters have a right to omit some or all the phases of representation and to rely mainly on color and design for their effects. On the other hand, I think we must admit that for Michelangelo, Raphael, Dürer, and El Greco, sentiment and symbolism were an integral part of the effect they intended. We distort and disrupt their work if we try to disregard subject matter and treat their work solely from the point of view of 'significant form' (Bell) or plastic form (Barnes)."

## Chapter V

### FURTHER THOUGHTS ON ECCENTRICITY

ANTHROPONOMY is an unusual word, but it means simply the study of the facts and laws of human behavior. In approaching the subject of Anthro-Eccentricity, which is a little like the study of an epidemic, I have kept this strange word, anthroponomy, in mind as a sort of device to preserve a factual and objective attitude. I have sought first to understand before condemning.

There is a lurid side to Anthro-Eccentricity which makes emotional judgments easy. For instance, if we leave art for a moment and consider sex, we are confronted with the fact that some of the most attractive women, physically, fall in love with men of bestial appearance and character, who sometimes are out-and-out criminals. Although most women shun such types, these attractive women will follow these bestial men to the ends of the earth and will even go to prison as their partners. This may well be classified as a kind of eccentricity, and on sexual eccentricity most people give purely emotional judgments. But even in that field one should be a practitioner of anthroponomy.

Some day perhaps this science will tell us more about such things as stature, coloring of hair and eyes, and so on in relation to eccentricity. The researches of Dr. William Moulton Marston in psychology and the color of one's eyes and hair are important.

A catalogue of eccentrics would be almost endless. There is the type of eccentric who is achromatic, that is, one who sees only in blacks and grays. There may even be among the Anthro-Eccentrics some men of genius. No

doubt there are talented individuals among them but their talent, because of their idiosyncrasy, works to destroy the art standards of the past centuries. And we must never forget the pseudos among the eccentrics. The test for these is when they come to have their portraits painted. Looking into the mirror, the pseudo certainly would not like to see a distorted face, and when he gets his portrait done, he usually employs an academician who will flatter him. One thing you can wager your last dollar on, he wants no barbaric African influence in his portrait.

Part of our catalogue of eccentrics would be reserved for patrons of Eccentric art. Some of them will claim that they can like Rembrandt or Da Vinci and like Rouault too! But such a person is no true connoisseur. He makes the mistake of considering Rouault an exotic dish when in fact it is simply raw uncooked food. Some eccentrics do get a thrill occasionally by changing over to the concentric but almost always they come back to their original leanings.

It is worthy of remark that some of our leading "beauticians" are well-advertised owners of this Anthro-po-Eccentric art, collecting the French "moderns," early American Primitives, and Ivory Coast specimens. We can suspect that this penchant of theirs comes from a surfeit of desire for beauty and classic perfection. The source of their reaction is obvious; they desire a change for a while, and perhaps will come back to a normal taste.

Another type of pseudo-eccentric is the person who wishes to cover up a disappointment in life by flaunting a mantle of "superiority." This is a defense mechanism similar to the one of the little boy who threatens that he will run out into the backyard and eat worms because his parents have punished him. The pseudo-eccentric flaunts to the world his Anthro-po-Eccentric pictures as a sign of super-intellectual pursuits. It is a form of vengeance against the world that has neglected him, and he no more likes the pictures than the little boy likes worms. Still, as long as he

attracts attention, he derives some satisfaction. He may even receive a thrill, like that of the normal concentric art collector, when he is asked to lend his pictures for exhibitions where his name will appear as a collector, and in the end, under this spell, he may actually regard his pictures as examples of real art.

The person who tries to combine the eccentric with his concentric taste resembles a man who has contracted a heavy cold and lost all sense of taste in eating. Our "modern eccentric" art patron often tries to combine the modern paintings he purchases with the works of primitive artists in the medieval times. What he overlooks is that the medieval artists were finished artists within their narrow limits of expression. They, moreover, had no immediate predecessors to rely upon. Our "modernists," on the other hand, have a heritage of great art but choose to disregard it. They cannot seem to accept a finished work of art. So their case is quite different from the artists who worked under the scholasticism that was prevalent from the time of Charlemagne until about 1450 A.D.

Then the literary men have to be brought into our catalogue. They often, in their biographical writing, in order to spice the book, will make an artist, a poet, or a writer eccentric, and this has an influence on public taste.

How shall I sum up this matter of eccentricity which has occupied me for several essays? I fall back on biology and heredity once more, and from biology I take the example of weed control. It may seem strange to the reader to get ideas from Department of Agriculture bulletins and from textbooks on problems of biology that by analogy seem to apply to the control of the weeds of eccentricity in art, but such is the case. Investigations have shown that there are almost incredible numbers of seeds of weeds in the soil, and the best agricultural brains have labored to discover means of controlling them. An analogous series of investigations

and research into methods of control seem indicated in the arts.

To carry out my analogy, look at plant life. Nature provides grass for the sustenance of animals. The animals in turn exhale carbon dioxide, and the plants use it to produce food. The plants help one another, but among them are "black sheep," namely, weeds. Otherwise there is harmony. According to the whims and demands of Nature, every living thing in animal or plant life acts in a certain way and is regulated by certain habits. Turning to the human species there is also harmony of enterprise, and dissonance too—the dissonance of the weed of eccentricity. Whether in art or some other sphere, the conflict between eccentric and concentric forces goes on. Like the good farmer, the concentric endeavors to eliminate the weeds which continue to crop up, no matter how persevering the farmer is. We must reconcile ourselves to the fact that the unwelcome and uninvited eccentric guest will appear amongst the endeavors of the concentrics, but that simply means that our methods of weed control must be more highly developed.

Weed control in art is the discipline of taste. Let us recall what Kant says about taste. "Taste is the faculty of estimating an object or a type of idea in respect of satisfaction or dissatisfaction without any interest," that is, without a bias in favor of some practical interest. "The object of such satisfaction is called beautiful."

But can taste be truly educated, the teachers of esthetics have asked. My answer is that taste can be cultivated up to certain points by the right association with people in the arts. In some persons taste is dormant, but once awakened it can develop profoundly. However, taste is intensely individual, complicated by one's psychology. At bottom it is biological.

All judgments of taste, certain teachers of esthetics will argue, are statements of individual preferences, but they will then add that adequate art criticism can alter the in-



dividual's genuine judgment. This presupposes that the critic is capable to point out esthetic aspects that others do not see. This is frequently questionable. I need mention only the violent disagreements of critics, to show obvious difficulty in the way. The best estheticism is outcome of the winnowing of Time.

The last word on the discussion of Anthro-po-Eccentricity is probably somewhere in the chromosome theory. As Werkmeister explains, the heredity of special characters is accomplished through a transmission from one generation to the next of the chromosomes. Each chromosome consists of a large number of "determiners" called genes. Somewhere in these genes are the "determiners" of eccentricity.

Part II

THE KEY QUESTIONS OF ART



## Chapter VI

### IN PRAISE OF IMAGINATION

THE FACULTY we name imagination has drawn from great men statements of homage that should be engraved in stone. One of the most beautiful and memorable of these was uttered by John Ruskin who declared that "imagination is a pilgrim on the earth, and her home is heaven." Long before him Leonardo da Vinci said with the beautiful finality that distinguished his deep mind that "painting is a matter of the mind." Elie Faure somehow distorts the meaning of this statement a little; those who have encountered it in Faure's *History of Art* should be reminded that it is something we call inspiration that sets the imagination on fire, and then with the aid of his eyes and hands, the artist creates art.

Another famous and memorable statement about the high rank of imagination was made by the French poet Baudelaire. "The imagination," the poet of *Les Fleurs du Mal* wrote, "is the most scientific of the faculties, because it alone understands the universal analogy." "The most scientific of the faculties" . . . surely that explains why Samuel Morse, Robert Fulton and other inventors were also painters. It explains why Leonardo himself excelled in both engineering and art, not to speak of Goethe, who was a scientist and a great poet combined. We need not wonder that Santayana, one of America's great philosophers, has written that "in imagination, not in perception, lies the substance of experience, while science and reason are but its chastened and ultimate form."

Such is the manner in which great men have spoken of imagination. Now let me say what imagination is not. It

is not the work of artists who copy Nature, no matter how "significant" their form may be, a stricture which of course applies to painters like Cézanne and Van Gogh. One may abstract from Nature but not "improve" upon it. One has only to compare their work with Turner's, for instance, and one sees what the great Turner derived from Nature. (See Figure 13.) Here is profound imagination, abstracted from Nature! Such painters as Cézanne and Van Gogh use very little imagination but depend upon and imitate Nature. A landscape or an object merely reproduced without imaginative quality on the canvas does not make a masterpiece, no matter how much Wilenski may prate of "architectural form." Wilenski, as we might suspect, condemns the Romantic school of painters, and this is a school that makes a special and predominant appeal to the imagination, the greatest factor in art.

The great Sergei Rachmaninoff, composer and pianist, who recently died, once said: "Music should bring relief. It should rehabilitate minds and souls, and modern music does not do this. If we are to have great music, we must return to the fundamentals which made music of the past great. Music cannot be just color and rhythm; it must reveal the emotions of the heart." By the "emotions of the heart" he meant the imaginative interpretation of our emotions. How well this fits the art of painting! In the way the imagination is regarded, we have once again a fundamental cleavage between Anthro-Concentrics and Anthro-Eccentrics.

To define any subject, it is always helpful to go to the root meaning of a word. The word imagination is derived from the word image. I invite the reader to lift his eye from this page and look at some object in the room he is in. Then turn away from that object for a second and try to recall its appearance without looking at it. One sees an image of the object with his mind's eye and one is using

his imagination. This simple exercise is the beginning of sound thinking about the nature of imagination.

The painter who is painting from Nature has to use his imagination in this way just as soon as his eye leaves the object for the canvas. This is a limited use of the imagination, it is true, and cannot by itself be considered a great employment of this magical faculty.

Higher in the scale is the artist who paints solely from imagination inspired by ideals of life embodied in poetry and music, which are abstractions and inspirations from Nature. This I consider to be art in a truer sense. I wish to speak also of literary imagination, so superbly exemplified by Shakespeare, who enables the reader to enter and create a whole world of his own. To Greek art and to Shakespeare the world is indebted for the most magnificent stimulus to the widest play and powers of the imagination.

What should a masterpiece of painting have? It should have the "significant form" that Bell talks about so much, it should present unusual arrangements of color harmonies, and above all it should be supreme in imaginative quality.

Imagination then is the faculty of the mind that forms images. Without light there can be no color. With stronger light, color becomes brighter and more visible. The antithesis of sunlight is absolute darkness. The Nineteenth Century philosophers went so far as to consider sensations to be forms of imaginings.

In writing about the imagination we are always spanning great distances in thought. The starting point can be the image of a sensation, such as a visual image or an aural image or a gustatory image. But we finish with the sublime. The Greeks and the Great Masters exercised their imaginations before they began work on their projects to depict the idea. Their finished works in turn became sources of inspiration to posterity and led their posterity to exercise imagination in the widest sense of the term. We have

seen that imagination gives power and truth to a scientific conception, and conversely we can say that a scientific conception cannot become artistic unless the imagination has played a part in its formulation. There are moments when one is ready to say that the greatest boon art brings to men is the cultivation of their imagination. From the Great Masters onward, imagination has found symbolism one of its greatest means for speaking to the onlooker.

Let us digress to another art, the art of music, and test for a moment our thinking about imagination. In judging music we should not be influenced by the title or the program which the composer might have had in mind when he wrote it. He is entitled to use his own imagination in selecting a title. The listener, however, influenced by the title, often subconsciously conjures up an illusion based on the title. This can happen in listening to *Heilige Nacht* or Debussy's *Afternoon of a Faun* or to the opera *Faust*, for example. The result is that the mental illusion becomes a reality to the listener. We should be able to see that our imagination works in two ways. One, imaginative concepts may guide us to the truth of idealities. Two, they may guide us to imagine in turn an illusion or even a delusion. After I had heard *Faust* many times, I imagined an environment which was not truthful but was an illusion.

What Dr. James M'Cosh once wrote applies here. He remarked that the imagination reproduces objects in new forms or dispositions and adds that the power of imagination is always constructive. This our experience in listening to music confirms. It is Roger Fry who asserts that of all the arts music supplies the strongest stimulus to the imaginative life, and with this I agree; it is certainly a stronger stimulus than we can get from still life objects. An artist will get his abstraction from music far more readily than from concrete objects. But, says Fry, music has the least power of controlling the direction of the imaginative life. I am tempted to ask the rude question, So what?

The control of direction is above and beyond our imaginative qualities.

We can, I believe, clarify our conception of the role and nature of imagination if we discuss what is wrong in Benedetto Croce's writing about intuition and expression in his *Aesthetic*. As some of my readers doubtless recall, Croce says there are two forms of knowledge which he names intuitive knowledge and logical knowledge. Intuitive knowledge is gained through the imagination, logical knowledge through the intellect. Knowledge according to the Italian philosopher is made up of either images or concepts.

This is very neat, but is it true? I do not believe that the operation of human psychology can be split up quite so neatly. I hold rather that knowledge gained through the imagination has much in common with the knowledge of the intellect, and the quotations from Da Vinci, Santayana, and others with which this essay opened would seem to support my view. Invention is the product of human imagination. An inventor as a rule is highly imaginative (recall Morse and Fulton), and yet he applies his intellect to perfect his invention. Croce says that certain truths cannot be defined syllogistically and must be learned intuitively. But perhaps truth is relative, and we must be prepared to entertain the idea that truth itself is an illusion. What I have to say in another essay on the true, the good and the beautiful should be related to this point.

It should not be forgotten that Croce's theory is based on physics and makes much of force and motion. He treats art as an expression and insists that man's knowledge is a knowledge of images and imagination in the final analysis. This, of course, is only an hypothesis. Trite as it may seem to say so, no one can penetrate to the ultimate mysteries of Nature. Human mind is finite. We are permitted to think that our universe was created by some supreme power we call God, and we cannot think clearly and with certainty



about this problem of who created the universe and we shall never solve the problem of what created the Creator. There is a limit beyond which we cannot reason. According to Darwin, we are the descendants of the lower species. We know that the savage has fewer words than we have, the ape has no words, at all, only chatterings to offer, and the animal kingdom in its lower forms has still less to offer. We are controlled by Nature, our life's destinies are subject to Nature (or God, if you will). Quite possibly Nature or whatever mysterious power rules us does not want us to understand its mysteries.

In certain periods we make progress and then, thanks to Nature's whims, we retrogress. Wars, plagues, epidemics and other disasters visit us to wipe out our progress. Was not Newton wise when he told someone who had praised his knowledge that whatever he had discovered including his great law of gravitation was comparable only to finding a pebble on the great shore of man's ignorance?

We reckon with Croce today. The artist of the Middle Ages reckoned with Plato. Because of his religious affiliation, this artist sought to prove that art is that which touches the human soul and is not sensual, as Plato contended. Perhaps had Plato lived in the medieval period of art, he might have modified his views. Tolstoi centuries later pondered Plato's point of view and held that the religious spirit should be a factor in art, like the brotherhood of man.

Like Croce, Elie Faure's glib generalizations on the imagination force the reflective reader to think once more about the mysteries of Nature. There are certain things in Nature which we cannot perceive with our senses, although we know they are there. Scientific research by imaginative scientists has revealed these hidden things to us. In the plastic arts the only instrument we have is the eye which pictures to our mind the object we view. But if the viewer is himself imaginative, he can enter into the artist's

mental orbit and perhaps even recreate or enhance what he finds by his own imagination. If the spectator is unresponsive to the artist's work, he will reject it.

But now comes an important point. Many times he will accept an artist's point of view through his ear. What do I mean by this? I mean that it is the propaganda or interpretation that he hears that sways his judgment. It is a cold fact that much of the world's art, old and new, has been purchased not because the eye was delighted and understood but because the ear of the purchaser was won. Many a buyer of art has been seduced by a beguiling word or phrase dropped into his ear by a critic or sponsor of an artist's work. When these words have been repeated by everybody, they lodge in his unconscious as he looks at certain paintings. For instance, everyone has heard the tone of Corot's landscapes labelled "silvery," and has heard Monet's broken colors called "crushed gems." Many people have heard of Rouault's "stained glass" quality. Did these painters have these phrases in mind when they painted? I very much doubt it.

Because Shakespeare used astronomical terms, should we therefore believe he was qualified in astronomy? An ordinary person or even an innocent child might say something casually which could be taken up by a person of learning and repute and advertised and exploited so much that the sayer goes down in history; yet the sayer was quite unaware of the significance of what he uttered. So it is sometimes with painters after the critics have coined their phrases about the qualities the painters allegedly strove to put in their works. Carried to an extreme, one might say that the young Serbian patriot who fired the shot that set off World War I at Sarajevo was the father of Soviet Russia. This was the last thing he had in mind; he acted out of Serbian patriotism alone. Yet he touched off the events that led to the overthrow of the Tsars and the coming of

Lenin and Communism. We need skeptical ears when we visit art galleries.

But I must not let our theme of the imagination carry me too far afield. Kant gave our subject a fruitful twist when he distinguished between the reproductive imagination (recall of images) and the productive imagination (day-dreams, artistic creation, etc.). At the same time Kant distinguishes two types of memory which he calls retentiveness and recollections. I do not see how anyone can quarrel with Kant's classification of types of imagination, but a comment is permissible on what he says about two kinds of memory. There is a type of personality that has very little or no retentive memory for the things he is unreciprocative toward and uninterested in. You may call him an introvert, if you like; but remember that at the same time he may be very imaginative and creative in his approach to the great problems of mankind. Only a tiny fraction of the human race is creative and imaginative. I would select Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer as the types of persons whose minds excluded things they were not interested in, yet were highly imaginative. On the other hand, there is the type of person who possesses a most retentive mind and is very observant; he can give you minute details of his past experiences. Yet he may be totally lacking in creativity and imagination. Then there is the very rare type, like Macaulay, who have great mental stature and possess marvelous photographic retentive memories; Macaulay's feats in remembering the page he had just read were astounding.

The case of Beethoven is very interesting. After he became completely deaf, he still composed fine music. He must have had very vivid auditory imagery to do this, for his feat means that although he could not hear the notes, he could play over the score of his composition and get the sound of his music.

What a marvelous thing imagination is! There are

times when it seems this faculty of man is beyond praise. It enables us to peer into the future and see events that have not occurred. But it also sheds its magic over the past. When our thoughts refer to the "real past," as we call it, we name them recollections; but imagination enters into our recollections and the unreal becomes part of the real past. For myself I never weary of contemplating the mystery of the imagination.

We can begin with the nervous system and say that it stimulates the mind. We can start with the physics of matter and the elementary psychology of mind. We can study the vibrations of light, color, heat and sound. In this way we accumulate much knowledge. But then there is a leap from what we know scientifically to the wonders of imagination as they occur in us.

If you want to see the marvelous powers of imagination, watch children at play. The boy with his blocks builds houses that are very real to him. A broom becomes his horse, a boat made from a newspaper folded in a certain way becomes nothing less than a battleship to him. Or the girl, see how she takes a rag and it becomes a doll that she can imagine gets sick and needs imaginary pills to get well.

Someone has said that memory is the mirror of the mind, and imagination is the reflection of the mind. How true this seems as we watch children grow up. They become avid readers of fairy tales and fiction and invest what they read with reality. A few years go by and these imaginative children crave to invent things or to paint or to write. And now they are adult and discover that to imagine and create is one of the most durable satisfactions man knows.

As children they had created a world of their own. As adults they create another world by the imagination, a world one level or plane above the world of childhood. Poets and artists sometimes bridge the two worlds. This is admirably shown in the opera, "Hänsel and Gretel," which reveals that its creators fully appreciated and understood a

child's fears of his tormentors, yet derive from this understanding a special enjoyment because they situate themselves from above in the child's world of reality.

In ending this chapter, I wish to mention one of the newer "isms" in the art of our time. It is called "Surrealism," which implies: "above realism." In practice, it deals with dreams as a creation of art, and it requires imagination. Some art critics sneer at "Surrealism," because of the exaggerated fantasy of the surrealist artist. Dreams to the surrealist are as real as life is, for we must remember that dreams are real to the dreamer.

We ask: Is life real or is it an illusion? We can measure it only by our senses and cannot reason beyond that. The surrealist lives in a world of his own, just as the realist lives in his real world. As a rule, the realist is not capable of understanding the mind of a dreamer. The surrealist has been condemned by some art critics because at times he oversteps the accepted boundaries of imagination in his depiction of the ludicrous and disagreeable, and because he consciously creates his own dreams. But if the surrealist expresses his dreams esthetically and pleasingly to the eye of the beholder, it matters not what the source of his dream creation might be.

Surrealism is nothing new. It was employed by the old masters like Hieronymus Bosch, Goya, Blake, and others, and even the Italian primitive painters used various symbols of the imagination in dream-like expressions in their art. Admittedly, surrealism in art has great room for improvement, but since it stems from the imagination, I consider it a worthy experiment in artistic endeavor. A fault I find in a few of our present-day surrealists, is one which many of our critics have commended. To my amusement, it is the "draftsmanship" these critics praised—giving it parity with that of the Renaissance painters—without the knowledge that it was nothing else but fragmentary copies

from famous old masters, synthetically arranged and passed off as the artist's own dream creation.

An age which undervalues the imagination is an age to be pitied. The imagination is the jewel of human psychology and its wonder-working potency makes us fully accept Ruskin's metaphor which I shall give myself the pleasure of repeating: "Imagination is a pilgrim on the earth, and her home is heaven."

## Chapter VII

### "SUCH STUFF AS DREAMS"

#### I.

THERE IS NO better way of learning how finite our minds are than to try to discover the truth about illusion.

Let us set the stage for a humble pursuit of the truth about illusion by recalling the contrasted views of Plato and Aristotle on this subject. Plato believed in certain ideal or essential forms as being above what we call everyday reality. The daily "realities" of human experience he regarded as remote reflections of these ideal forms; they were not the true realities. Plato was rigorously logical in concluding that works of fine art were therefore reflections of reflections, and he disesteemed them according to their remoteness from the ideal or typical or sense-transcending existences that he postulated.

Aristotle, on the other hand, refused to go to this idealistic extreme. He insisted that reality is not above us but is right here in our earthly lives. It has been said that everybody is either a Platonist or an Aristotelian, although he may not be articulate about his temperamental view of the universe. At the outset we must note this great contrast in philosophy about illusion and reality.

Sometimes poets cut straight through the arguments of the metaphysicians and intuitively seize upon the truth. What does Shakespeare say about the subject that divided Plato and Aristotle? "We are such stuff as dreams are made on" and "There is nothing good or bad in the world, but thinking makes it so"—that is what Shakespeare tells us. Pondering his message, we begin to feel all life dissolving into dream-stuff, into a succession of illusions.

Is art, we ask ourselves, an illusion? Is love an illusion? Are the cosmic relations which our planet seems to maintain purely illusory? If art is simply an illusion, what becomes of Plato's philosophy of the good, the true, and the beautiful? We feel as if we were drifting into interstellar space, and we begin to wonder if man has devised a language of words fine enough to capture the meanings required to explain the nature of illusion. Perhaps the entire world is an illusion, a vast dream, which we cannot express in words.

In this drifting sea of speculations, one must make a beginning somewhere. Let us begin with love, a subject to which the psychologists and philosophers of our day have given a new interpretation. They reason that love is egoistical and not love in the sense we usually interpret it. This new interpretation, contradictory as it may seem to the meaning of love as we used to understand it, I must accept for the time being, subject to more convincing reasoning against it.

For the present I divide love into categories; physical or sensual love, fraternal love, patriotic love, maternal love, and so on. Unreciprocated physical love is egoistic, I maintain. The forcing of one's attentions upon someone who does not wish to receive them; the kissing of a child for one's own enjoyment although the child squirms and is uncomfortable and does not wish to be kissed—here the egoistic nature of physical love is clearly apparent. But when one loves someone and one's feeling is reciprocated, this is a reasonable state of affairs, and it is much more difficult to call this reciprocated physical love simply egoism; yet it is, when analyzed.

Brotherly love means the love of one's fellow man and is symbolized by the assistance of an unfortunate person (the Good Samaritan act). But as Mark Twain and others have maintained, it can be said that one performs acts of



fraternal love to keep one's conscience quiet—and this can be called acting from an egoistic motive.

Should not patriotic love be called patriotic devotion rather than love? The exact word does not matter to the argument at this point, which is that whether it is love or devotion, it often seems to be the expression of self-gratification. The self-gratification may last only for a moment, but the purity of sacrifice of oneself has been called into question. Again egoism rears its head.

For myself I consider maternal love the highest form of love. But in our pursuit of love, we must ask even of maternal love, the love of a woman for her child and all the sacrifices she gladly makes for motherhood, is it not also a gratification of the ego? If we decide that it is, then we have come to a place where we say there is really no love in the world but only egoism.

Even our apprehension of time has been attacked as illusory and wrong. We consider that we live in a world of three dimensions of space, and that time is something. Then along come the fourth dimension philosophers like P. D. Ouspensky and by powerful reasoning argue that time is the fourth dimension of space imperfectly sensed and that we exist under a temporal illusion.

What is the poor artist to do amidst this dazzling play of illusions? What of the good, the true, and the beautiful? Love cannot exist without goodness; if love turns into an illusion, goodness perforce also turns into an illusion. Art mimics Nature, that is, it mimics an illusion, and so is damned as an illusion, as Plato thought. The trinity of the good, the true, the beautiful, flies into emptiness.

Before this riddle of the universe, the artist realizes how finite is his capacity for expression, how limited his words are. Nature gives us mysteries but not the power seemingly to turn the key and unlock her mysteries. Perhaps we need a new vocabulary to treat of love; perhaps

our limited language tricks us in some subtle way when we try to deal with the word "illusion." All we know is that we are extremely limited in our thoughts about the universal riddle.

We need courage and steadfastness to face the possibility that art is an illusion. We have to face courageously the fact that we are subject to the laws of Nature (or God, if you wish) and that Nature controls our destiny. Art emanates from Nature, as the Pantheists believe, but the artist can still be true to himself in what he portrays, notwithstanding that his results may be inferior art and may at best be illusory.

Let me restate the thought of the preceding paragraph. Art in itself may not express the true, because truth in the last analysis is an illusion. But the artist should nevertheless be truthful to himself in order to express that personal truth which he himself cherishes, the relative truth of art, and he must not accept the opinions of others unless he gives them an inner sanction from his own experience. The imagination can do two things; it can fulfill one's personal truth, or it can create a delusion or deception. The imagination is the faculty that explores illusions and can turn them into what I have called personal truth (truthfulness to one's own self as an artist), or into a piece of deception.

How tricky illusions can be, how easily one can fall into self-deception, is evident when one thinks of the power of auto-suggestion. Coué-ism and other cults of auto-suggestion seemed foolish to many people, but to some they were very helpful, as psychologists and doctors have testified. Many of us are on guard against suggestion and auto-suggestion giving us false pictures of the world, but if we had to trust to our physical senses alone, we would not get a true picture of reality. The example has often been given of the wrong idea we get from the sun and earth if we trust to our sense of vision alone, for that sense tells us that the sun rotates around the earth every twenty-four hours,

whereas our scientific understanding teaches us that it is the earth that rotates each day. In this matter of illusion, we can even go the Platonic formalists one better. They held that pre-existent ideas were real, but we can say that their conclusion is illusory since their minds by which they reached it were not independent but were strictly motivated by Nature. They thought what Nature motivated them to think.

Look at Kant! He claimed an exceptional status for mathematical laws. A straight line, he said without fear of rebuttal, is the shortest distance between two points and always will be the shortest distance. Therefore mathematical laws are not only real in themselves but they are also derived from man's reason as *a priori* concepts. What has happened to this statement of what is real and not illusory? Well, along came Einstein and the contention that a curved line or an oblique line can be the shortest distance between two points. Newton declared that one throws an object straight up into the air and gravitation brings it down in a perpendicular straight line. But Einstein with his frame of relativity reckons with the rotation of the earth spinning on its axis around the sun, and therefore an oblique line in this instance would be the shortest distance between two points. But still this is an illusion, for according to the writer on science, Hugh W. Sanford, "Many have made the error of assuming that gravitational force is continuous, and that continuously curved paths are caused by its unremitting deflection of motions otherwise straight." Illusion piled upon illusion—one wishes the scientists of the future better luck than we have had in disentangling the illusory from the real.

Maybe, as I have hinted, we should declare a moratorium on the vocabulary of illusion until we get more precise words. Groping toward a definition of illusion, I should say that it means human subjugation to Nature which controls our destinies and beguiles us toward fulfilling Nature's ends. The one certain thing we know is the finite

ness of our minds. Some are better thinkers than others, some are even intellectual giants, but there is a sharp limit to human wisdom. And there are certain experiences for which words are not sufficiently expressive. We are a mystery to ourselves. At times others understand us better than we ourselves. We gaze into the finest quality mirror, yet others see us better. And, as is scientifically known, our voices, as we hear them, are not the same as our auditors hear.

2.

What do the books on art say about this perplexing subject of illusion? Since a bit of lightness oftentimes refreshes the mind when it is concentrated on a serious subject, I cannot refrain from telling the famous story of Giotto's fly which Vasari has passed along to us. As a boy Giotto studied with Cimabue, and one day he painted a fly on the nose of a figure on which Cimabue was at work. The fly looked so natural that Cimabue, returning to work on his canvas, believed it to be real and lifted his hand to drive it away. This is a fable of how we can be tricked by the illusory.

Now for more subtle thoughts on illusion. In his book *The Meaning of Art*, Dr. A. Philip McMahon says that Santayana teaches that beauty is pleasure regarded as the quality of a thing. I would qualify this by observing that beauty is a pleasure to the senses, but we must remember that the senses can be surfeited and then beauty becomes antipathetic to them. Beauty, like goodness, is perhaps an illusion, or even a delusion; certainly it is relative. If we have the misfortune to be confronted with the ugly most of the time and then are vouchsafed a glimpse of beauty, we fall into worship of beauty. It is precisely like wearying of the monotony of a long rainy spell and then greeting the sunshine, which we appreciate all the more for the long rain.

I am in accord with the following passage from Dr.

McMahon's book, for I had long been thinking in that fashion myself.

"How is it that in spite of its lack of the substantial existence possessed by the model, a work of art somehow reproduces that object after which it is modelled, and also affords us satisfactions which the original does not convey? One answer is through illusion. The object of art seems to be something which it is not. We realize that it is not what it seems, because it offers an escape to a realm where material existence no longer binds the spirit. Illusion is a plausible consequence of, or alternative to, both the principal interpretations of imitation. Imitations of the accidents and the imperfections of concrete reality, when carried over into art, may impress us strongly with the genuineness and sincerity of the artist's creation. The persuasiveness of his duplication of ordinary experience makes us admire all the more the skill with which he has conveyed to us a sense of the tangibility of the individual things represented. To reproduce so convincingly in a medium which, after all, retains only a portion of the object's reality is accomplished through an accepted delusion, but it is an illusion still."

I concur with this statement and wish only to add that the artist no doubt is conscious of the fact that while painting his picture he is true to himself and is putting down what he believes to be true expression. Notwithstanding, he is all the time guided by Nature, of which inescapably he is a part, according to pantheistic teaching. But he is limited in his expression; he is confined to his human status with more mental equipment than the animals but as surely fixed in Nature. "Thou shalt go no further," Nature is always warning him.

The particular form in which artists study illusion is called perspective. We know for a fact that a man a hundred feet away from us is not smaller than a man face to face with us, but he looks like a fraction of the nearer man.

This is the trick of perspective. Dr. McMahon notes that Mantegna gives us the duplication of optical phenomena carried out by geometrical projections; this gives the onlooker the sensation of gazing into deep space. I agree that it is Mantegna's imagination using technical means for creating illusion that dominates his art. But we must go further in speaking of Mantegna. The greatness of this artist lies in the world of his own which he has created and which conveys his ideas to others capable of digesting them.

Let us turn from McMahon, with whom I have a measure of agreement to a writer on modern art with whom I strongly disagree. I refer to Wilenski, of course, and I disagree with him as strongly on the illusion of perspective as on most other topics. He talks much about "mechanical vision," but this very mechanical vision is an illusion. Wilenski with his usual unexpectedness asks, "Why should an artist say in a picture that one of his figures is six feet high and another two when he knows that all men are approximately the same height?" The answer is obviously this: art functions by means of human sight, and the sense of sight observes things in perspective and in a tri-dimensional way. This is an illusion, to be sure, but there are many things that deceive the eye when subjected to scientific measurement. And art itself is a visual illusion.

There would, of course, be more substance in Croce's *Aesthetic* concerning illusion than in any fanciful remark that Wilenski would make. Croce constantly repeats that art is not knowledge and that we must realize and understand the theoretical character of simple intuition. "The belief," says Croce, "that a picture yields only visual impressions is a curious illusion. The bloom on a cheek, the warmth of a youthful body, the sweetness and freshness of a fruit, the edge of a sharp knife, are not these, too, impressions obtainable from a picture? Are they visual?" I think there is some hair-splitting in this argument. Of course, the impressions are visual. It is by the organ of

sight that they are conveyed to the mind, and only then does the mind analyze the artist's creation and break it down into other sensory appeals. The eye is the means that leads to the greater scope of the reception of a painting.

Finally, Croce brings us back to the starting point of my essay, back, that is, to Plato, whose teaching about art Croce admirably summarizes. "Art then," says Croce in reproducing Plato's doctrine, "does not belong to the lofty and rational region of the soul but to the sensual. . . . It can serve only sensual pleasure which troubles and obscures." I find myself concluding this second section of my essay with a reaffirmation of what I thought in the first section, namely, since art is an illusion and a deception, then the cosmic relations are also illusory and deceptive. The good, the true and the beautiful (Plato's trinity) are involved in fatal contradictions, as we have seen. The following reasoning seems inescapable; a perspective view of a house or a human being will show you either one to be larger near at hand than when seen from a distance; this is an optical illusion because Nature has caused the eye to see things in that way. We are endowed by Nature with only a very limited means of thinking and inventing words, although in comparison with lower animals we seem rich in expressive powers.

### 3.

Let us now come at the subject of illusion from the psychologist's angle, remembering that he stands quite close to physiology, and let us see if we can make any further progress toward solving the riddle. Gardner Murphy in his book, *A Briefer General Psychology*, carefully explains to us about the "negative after-image" (the complementary color we see on a gray field after steady gazing at a color), about the phenomenon of color contrast ("If one looks fixedly at a green square on a gray field, in twenty or thirty

seconds there will appear a reddish border about the square"), and about the complicated "color wheel" (which seems to show that white light and any of the grays is made of a mixture of wave lengths). In contrast to the Young-Helmholtz theory of color, Murphy brings forward the Hering theory which states that three fundamental color receptors serve respectively for (1) red and green, (2) yellow and blue, (3) white and black. To show how complicated these matters are when tested in the laboratory, let me present a brief quotation from Murphy on the Hering theory. "Red and green are produced by opposite types of chemical change in one receptor. The overworking of the red function caused by staring at a red surface will, upon closing the eyes, cause the reverse chemical change, and a green negative after-image will be seen. So, too, since opposite chemical changes are involved for red and green, the mixture of red and green on a color wheel gives a neutral effect, gray arising from the fact that all light affects to some extent the black-white receptor. Blue and yellow bear the same relation as red and green, and white and black are regarded as psychologically just as fundamental as the other four colors; each member of a pair 'neutralizes' the other member of that pair."

At another point in his book, Murphy shows us an experiment with cubes wherein one can see six or seven cubes, depending on the way one looks at them—an experiment that underlines what this essay has been saying about illusion.

I believe that illusion can also be connected with the workings of the famous Adlerian theory of compensation. As a pupil of Freud, Adler was especially interested in the fact of compensation that kept cropping up in Freud's weekly seminar. He came to believe that the first reaction to life is a sense of weakness and broke with Freud when he adopted this emphasis. He had, for instance, noted that an animal with an injured eye might become very sharp-



sighted in the other eye. It follows from this that in any individual's reports on reality one must allow for the bias that might be produced by either a sense of inferiority or an over-compensation in some direction, thus permitting entrance to values that would turn out to be based on illusion.

Now to round up my remaining thoughts on illusion. Let us see once more if we can break out of the circular reasoning to which Nature seems to have condemned us on this topic. How true is mathematics? Is it true that numbers cannot lie? Well, it appears that there are irrational things in mathematics too; I refer the interested reader to Hugh W. Sanford's important book, *Science and Faith*. To use just one of Sanford's illustrations, "In geometry, therefore, the length of the diagonal of a square having sides of 'one' (1) is found to be an irrational number known as the square root of two. This is the incommensurable which shocked Pythagoras because it was an exception to his philosophy of number."

The primal mystery is that we are subjugated to Nature. This is a thought that occurs again and again to the artist who is by the nature of his work preoccupied with the study of Nature. It seems a commonplace thought until you dwell on it, and then it becomes mystifying. Science thus far has nothing to offer that is a reasonable explanation. On the question of whether mind is above matter or vice versa, we grope in darkness. One cannot exist without the other; until we know their exact relationship, we are subject to illusion.

If there are irrational things in mathematics, generally taken as the model of human knowledge, no wonder that Amiel exclaimed: "Science is a lucid madness occupied in tabulating its own necessary hallucinations. The philosopher laughs, for he alone escapes being duped while he sees other men the victims of persistent illusions." It would indeed be hard to excel Amiel's words on illusion. "All life,"

this great thinker wrote, "is the shadow of a smoke wreath, a gesture in the empty air, a hieroglyph traced for an instant in the sand, and effaced a moment afterward by a breath of wind, an air-bubble expanding and vanishing on the surface of a great river of being—an appearance, a vanity, a nothing. But this nothing is, however, the symbol of the universal being and this passing bubble is the epitome of the history of the world."

If Amiel's words seem sad to you, remember there is also happiness in being under an illusion. On fine summer evenings in New York I often stroll past Columbus Circle near Central Park. Columbus Circle is to New York somewhat as Hyde Park is to London—a spot frequented by open-air speakers and performers. Among these I sometimes see a buxom woman of pleasant face and an air of refinement, clad in flowing robes, her hair garlanded, who stands on a rostrum. With dramatic gestures she sings in a cracked voice to a motley audience that sometimes jeers at her. But I have no doubt that what she really sees in front of her is an audience at Carnegie Hall or the Metropolitan Opera House. Her unstable mind is swept by a wave of illusion, and her face shows high gratification, a desire satisfied by singing to an audience and bidding for plaudits. Some in the crowd pity her because she seems unable to get her gratification from the realities of the world, but they fail to understand how completely happy she is in her sphere of illusion. Only an approaching policeman who might arrest her shatters her illusion.

If, as some thinkers assert, the cosmic relations are illusions, then, going a step further, may we not say that our very thinking about illusion is itself an illusion? Assuming that time is an illusion and that it can be measured only by some complicated method of relativity, Nature has forced us to conceive it and to feel it with such sensual organs as we have; after that we grope in darkness for the meaning of time. Relativity thus far is the nearest approach we have

to the essence of time. In these questions I am an agnostic in the sense that Thomas Huxley called himself an agnostic when confronting the cosmic enigma.

The thing to remember is that just as dreams are real to the dreamer, so are illusions real to us in our waking state. But then comes the thought—is our very existence on this planet not a dream as well as an illusion? The analogy with dreams and dreamers leads us on to ask, do things really exist without the aid of our senses and our perceiving mind? In short, are we alive? Or are we figments of someone else's dream—that someone else being a cosmic being—and are we simply floating around in the time and space of a cosmic dream? We do not know.

Once again I strive to familiarize the reader with the thought that art may be an illusion. The eye is the dominant factor in the art of painting; it sees and refers to the mind for perception. Knowledge, as Plato knew, is not in sense but in reason acting on the suggestion of sensations. It is our mind that makes art possible, otherwise we should be living like animals in a wilderness.

If it is the object of Nature that certain things should appear real to the eye, then the eye willy-nilly accepts them as real—and yet these things may be illusory. How is it that Nature nevertheless has implanted wisdom in some members of the human race, so that they think in terms of illusion? Has not this way Nature discredited herself? Illusion is indeed an intricate problem. We can only keep chipping away at it, hoping to get it into some understandable shape.

We all understand that, deprived of our five senses, we could not even conceive of such a thing as life or death; we would not be aware of time and space, of heat and cold, speed and inertia, sweetness and acidity, the fragrance of a flower, and of all else that composes what we call living. By comparison, everything becomes relative. I have said before that though art may be an illusion, the artist may

nevertheless be true to himself, namely, may portray that which he understands to be true, may put forth entirely sincere efforts to state the truth as he personally and subjectively sees it. The words of Shakespeare keep coming back to mind: "We are such stuff as dreams are made on."

Yes, we are subdued to the laws of Nature (or God or some mysterious power). Our destiny is controlled. Conflicting opinions are held about it, and Voltaire was once moved to exclaim: "The history of human intellect is the history of human stupidity." Be that as it may, there have been geniuses, and Voltaire is among them, who have relieved the stupidity of man.

We can say no more than that our reasoning capacity is finite. Nature steps in and warns against trespassing on her secrets. Kant in his transcendental philosophy reasoned that we could not think beyond our senses. Perhaps our nearest approach to the problem of illusion, with which the problem of time and space is bound up, is through our mental processes using relative measurement or through a logic of contrast. The artist is often tempted to say: Let science solve the riddle.

One last word: Why should Nature give man just enough wisdom to discredit herself, that is, to let man suspect the realm of illusion? Man can even suspect that Nature has a much different time-scale from ours. To an insect or a microscopic creature, a minute or an hour is perhaps a very long span of time. Nature takes her own time to solve her problems. To her the human race is probably not yet mature enough to learn the answer to the problem of illusion. Will evolutionary processes carry us some day to the point of being able to understand? To say so is only to advance a hypothesis. Nature on the other hand may feel that we humans have jumped too far ahead mentally of the animal kingdom. Maybe Nature is halting our progress and trying to reverse her tendencies by disintegrating human thought. We know as a fact that mankind's

ideologies and progressive ideas resemble the ripened fruit of a tree. Like real fruit, our cultural ideas seem prone to disintegrate when ripeness has been attained. Then we have to wait for a new crop of ideas.

For the present we must await Nature's decision. In this spiritual struggle for the meaning of life, the initiative is not ours, but Nature's. We must wait.

Our waiting, however, need not be entirely without humor. Lecky in his *History of European Morals* relates the story of the monk Serapion who had conceived in his imagination a bodily form of the God he worshiped. A brother monk convinced him that God had not specific form. Serapion was driven to acknowledge all this, but when he knelt down to pray and found that he no longer beheld the vision to which he had made his supplications, he wept and cried out to the monk who had converted him, "You have deprived me of my God!"

## Chapter VIII

### A GLANCE AT ESTHETICS

AN ANTHROPO-CONCENTRIC mind likes to start a discussion with a definition, and this definition should be one that all reasonable people will accept. An Anthro-Eccentric also defines, but into his very terms themselves he introduces an eccentric content, thereby starting off a discussion in a biased manner. For a definition of esthetics, I have therefore consulted the *Encyclopedia Britannica* which is edited in the interests of broad agreement on basic subjects of thought.

The *Britannica* writer, following Kant's suggestion, links our sense of taste to esthetics. Of all our sense impressions, this sense is the most subjective and the most uncertain. It is also the source of highly pleasurable experiences. So it is with the experiences derived from art; they are highly subjective, very uncertain and highly pleasurable. But note this: despite this subjectivity, there is a general agreement among people, a certain uniformity in judging what is beautiful. It isn't a logical judgment; it's a judgment of value and "since it is relative," so the *Britannica* writer says, "to all competent ones (judges), it may be regarded as 'objective'—that is to say, as belonging to the object."

The mind creates its own beauty, but this beauty may be said in a sense to belong to the object, since competent people agree about it. Art could be called an esthetic emotional inspiration. And esthetics, the science of taste concerning beauty, can be traced back to Plato.

Esthetics has a moral value that often is not pointed out by the art-for-art's-sakers. Heredity often gives people a slant toward a strong character or toward a deteriorating character. To a person who is hereditarily inclined toward

badness of character, esthetics can be very helpful, for ethics and religion by themselves may not shape his character toward good ends; he will need the potent persuasiveness of music, painting, poetry, esthetic enjoyment to help him integrate his character. Esthetic enjoyment is in this way a moral asset.

Esthetics is, of course, connected with temperament. Preferences for romanticism and classicism are largely temperamental choices; each springs from a characteristic mentality.

A word of warning is in order at this point about leaving the judgment of art to philosophers. I am thinking particularly of Plato and Tolstoi. Except for Plato's thought about mimicry in art, they did not penetrate into the soul of the visual artist, and their familiarity with the visual arts left something to be desired. Would that these great men had studied art as artists do; then their veil of philosophy would not have concealed so much ignorance about the inner nature of esthetics.

In this essay I shall deal with the thoughts on esthetics of writers like Croce, Bell, Fry and others who whatever their faults have pored long and studiously over art. But it is the philosopher Kant who will lay out for us a good approach to these recent thinkers. "Taste," said Kant, "is the faculty of estimating an object or type of idea in respect of satisfaction or dissatisfaction without any interest." Notice the value he places on disinterestedness which doesn't mean uninterestedness. It does mean an estimation into which enters no practical evaluation, no utilitarian calculation. "The object of such satisfaction," Kant goes on to say, "is called beautiful." Beauty then, as another writer has said, is the esthetic experience of an artistic achievement. That does nicely as a brief definition to remember.

An oft-quoted statement of Kant's is the following: "A natural beauty is a thing that is beautiful; artistic beauty is the reproduction of a thing." But here we must remember

that Kant is pointing his remark straight at a certain type of art, neo-classical art, and the remark is not intended to apply more widely.

Let us now jump from Kant to our own day and the philosopher Croce who prides himself upon being an esthetician. To Croce art is spiritual, not physical. It is an expression of human intuition and human spirit. Spirit and intuition are, in fact, identical to Croce. This is the key to his metaphysical concepts. By intuition he means what others often mean by imagination and vision.

In his thoroughness Croce remarks upon a number of minor German estheticians whose theories need not detain us now, but I find that I have made the following marginal note upon the passage which may have some interest for my readers. 'Nature has inculcated in us a tendency whereby we imitate Nature and yet imagine that Nature imitates us, and this tendency gives us a pleasure we call esthetic. Nature, remember, has her own problems to solve. She creates things according to her own form of beauty and she is not concerned with pleasing us human beings, though indirectly she does please us at times. Nevertheless, the beauty of the artist's own creation is appreciated as much by the world as are Nature's own creations. We take Nature's creations as a matter of course because we realize that we are not on a par with the powers of Nature. But in the arena of human competition the artist's creation of beauty is comparable in that sphere to Nature's. And we wonder and marvel more at man's creations, knowing that he is a toy in the hands of Nature, than we do at the phenomenal achievements of Nature herself.

Clive Bell may be mistaken but he has the merit of forcing esthetic questions to a decision. He states his position frankly, that he must be made to feel a work of art by himself. The artist must get at his emotions through his eyes. Here Bell falls foul of Wilenski who admonished his public that they must not see through the mechanical eye which is



the natural eye. Bell also makes more of emotion than does Wilenski with his prejudice against romanticism. "He (the artist) must get at my emotions through my eyes," says Bell.

Bell puts the whole problem into very brief space when he asks, "Does any one feel the same kind of emotion for a butterfly or a flower that he feels for a cathedral or a picture?" That is, can we receive the esthetic thrill from Nature? To this I say that esthetic emotions are created spontaneously by inspiration. The source, human or natural, does not matter. It is true that one may not be able to secure the esthetic thrill from the wings of a butterfly to the degree that one does from a work of art, but the reason may well be that the butterfly is created by Nature in myriads and subconsciously we feel a deterioration in value produced by large numbers.

If, however, the artist produces a butterfly wing in realistic form on his canvas, many people may be inspired by it because it is the creation of a human being who is not as prolific as Nature, further because, as explained above, we feel that Nature's creations are out of our sphere of competition. While we receive a great esthetic thrill, we know subconsciously that we have to gratify vividness with the creations of our fellow man. Yet people have been moved to write about a butterfly or a rose esthetically; poets, musicians and artists have abstracted from them the inspiration for their creations. Heine, Chopin, Van Huysum, the painter; and many others were so inspired. No human being, no matter how poetic or how great his descriptive powers may be, could convey to someone else in words or music the emotional effects or objective description of a natural sunset precisely as he experienced it. Human conveyance is strictly limited. From where does the artist receive and transmit his esthetic inspiration if not from Nature? Beethoven was inspired by Nature to write his *Pastoral*, and similar statements can be made about Schubert and others.

Like Bell, Fry has the merit of driving an esthetic question into a corner and forcing an answer, although he may give the wrong answer. He drags in Plato and observes that the world has nevertheless continued obstinately to consider painting worth while, although the world has never quite made up its mind as to what exactly the graphic arts did for it. In writing on Plato and Tolstoi elsewhere, I have already given my answer to this statement. Fry on public taste quotes Bernard Shaw who once said in a typical Shavian manner that any picture which pleased more than ten per cent of the population should be immediately burned. Well, why destroy any picture that pleases more than ten per cent of the population? One can ask that even while sympathizing with the basic meaning of Shaw's remarks. It is not however a percentage question so much as a question of native receptivity to art. Our capacity to respond is there all right but our reception often fails for lack of effort and association. Let me illustrate this contention from a personal experience.

Some years ago I had an exhibition of my Color-Music paintings at the Anderson Galleries, New York. There were some Negro porters in attendance. This exhibition was accompanied by the playing of recorded music of the Great Masters, Wagner predominating. This music which was often repeated during the exhibition seemed to displease these men during the first days of the exhibition. They could not strike up an acquaintanceship with Wagner and Brahms and asked for some jazz music now and then as a divertissement. But toward the end of the two weeks of the exhibition, one of these attendants came to me and inquired where he might procure one of the records, and the record he wanted turned out to be the *Prelude* and the *Love Death* from Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*! The next in demand was Brahms' Second Symphony. On the last afternoon of my exhibition, I bade these amiable attendants goodbye, and as I walked out my footsteps were accompanied by a chorus

whistling Tschaikowski's *Symphony Pathétique* (third movement—*allegro molto vivace*). Here is an answer to Shaw's cynicism.

It is almost inevitable that one should mention Faure after discussing Bell and Fry. I agree with Faure, or rather I should say that I agree with Spinoza whom Faure quotes, that "the ideas that we have of exterior bodies indicate rather the constitution of our own body than the nature of exterior bodies." Everything is indestructible, according to Spencer, yet everything changes, as Faure says, and I agree with this paradox.

Croce is more systematic than Bell, Faure and Fry are, and it will further our discussion if I return to him for a moment. Dealing with objectivist philosophy, Croce finally hits upon the following very provocative example. He asks us to consider two philosophers, a dogmatist and a skeptic, having an argument which is listened to by an esthete. The argument is so evenly balanced that it is impossible to determine which is the side of truth and which side is false. But it is just this feeling of an exact balance that is to the esthete what he calls esthetic truth. If, however, one adversary overcomes the other, the error that is revealed is false esthetically. My reader is asked here to recollect what has been said elsewhere in this book on the good, the true and the beautiful.

Croce has an interesting explanation why the idealist Plato condemned art: it is because Plato did not, as an idealist, like the natural and realistic art of antiquity in general. Croce thinks that he was repelled by the finitude of this art and would have rejoiced in Christian art with its invocation of infinity. I have said elsewhere and repeat it here that Plato would assuredly have approved of the art of Giotto and of the medieval period.

One of the knottiest problems of esthetics is the relation between matter and form, or content and form. Does the esthetic fact consist of content alone, Croce asks, or of form

alone, or both together? I think it is possible that a clearer understanding of the fourth dimension would push this problem toward a solution. Within the three dimensions of length, depth and height the problem has proved most intricate. We must step outside of esthetics to solve it, for it is an illusion, no doubt promoted by Nature, to think of esthetics existing independently.

Oswald Siren in *Essentials in Art* takes a somewhat different tack from the other writers dealt with in this chapter, although he appears to start out along the Clive Bell path. He holds that for the great artist as well as for the religious devotee the physical universe exists only as a means to ecstasy; then he notes that there are many different kinds of ecstasies ranging from sensual intoxication to a philosopher's intellectual ecstasy. This is indeed true; there is a contemplative ecstasy that few know about. But ecstasy is a variable and personal thing. To the philosopher Schopenhauer the world was the worst of possible worlds, and he no doubt derived a certain ecstatic satisfaction from this conclusion. For Wordsworth a daffodil or a rainbow was sufficient to bring about a rapturous feeling.

Another writer on esthetics, Dr. Harold Newton Lee, detains us longer. Lee tilts against the notion that a "golden section" or "dynamic symmetry" or a serpentine line are objective terms in which an esthetic theory can be stated. He is right. Rhythm, proportion and balance have not esthetic value in themselves; isolated, they are meaningless. One thing hinges upon another. What counts in esthetics is the gestalt, the configuration of the whole. An unaccented single note in music or a single color in painting is meaningless in the esthetic sense; each part of a work of art should be indispensable to the whole.

I think, however, that Dr. Lee goes off the deep end when, discussing good taste and bad taste, he cites the Siwash Indian. He considers that the Siwash Indian has not adopted a standard but paints his house in combinations of

bright blue and red and green and yellow because of primitive joy in the spectacular. But how do we know that this Indian is not following the standards of his tribe and considers painting his house a very serious matter indeed? I am sure that it is not the light-hearted task we imagine it to be; I am sure he takes it as seriously as a civilized architect planning a stupendous and sumptuous modern structure. Moreover, in the Indian's environment his spectacular house has a harmonious setting along with the dwellings of the other aborigines. We paint our houses white to match our neighbors'; the Indian is equally neighborly with his color arrangements.

On another occasion, Dr. Lee develops a curious verbal distinction which does not strike me as sound. He invents something that he calls esthetic vulgarity; this is the confusion of non-esthetic with esthetic values. But it can be maintained that there can be no such thing as esthetic vulgarity. Either a thing is esthetic and therefore cannot be vulgar, or it is not esthetic, and thus cannot be called an esthetic vulgarity.

When Dr. Lee comes to discuss Kant's theory of esthetics, I think that my categories of concentric and eccentric taste might have been useful. For Kant, as Lee notes, the apprehension of beauty is a result of the exercise of judgment. This judgment is intellectual. But we have to admit more temperament into the judgment than Dr. Lee or Kant do. What is beautiful to one person often is not beautiful to another; here enters biological make-up and psychology and inherent taste. Here enters, in other words, the two types: the eccentric and the concentric.

Following the Kantian trail, Lee comes to pleasure as the evaluating factor in esthetic value. He qualifies Kant in various ways, claiming that Kant should reckon with the uniqueness of esthetic value ("this kind of value must be different from other kinds"), but I think it is safe to hold that pleasure in art does determine esthetic value—the more

pleasure, the greater the value. Kant insisted upon the subjectivity of esthetics, esthetic satisfaction being determined by pleasure and pain. It is remarkable that the Greeks, four centuries before Christ in the time of Zeno, were indifferent to pleasure and pain. I am referring, of course, to their Stoic ideas. I surmise that their sense of the esthetic was not regarded by them through the clear lens of Aristotelian concepts, because no doubt Aristotelian concepts seemed to them materialistic and pantheistic. Art being thought a pleasurable enterprise, the Stoics viewed it as a matter of indifference.

A comment by Lee on Croce will help to bind my essay back to our earlier discussion of Croce. Lee reproduces Croce's thought that it is not the external form of art that is important but that art is spiritual activity, art is expression. This is going too far. I say that the effort, the externalizing materialistic effort, is just as important, and one cannot function without the other. The spiritual activity and the externalizing activity are equally necessary, and between necessities one cannot choose.

How writers on esthetics disagree among themselves! Let me here introduce Thorburn who disagrees with Bell and Fry. Summarizing their views to mean that esthetic form is something that can be achieved independently of representation, Thorburn quite cleverly stands their argument on its head by stating, "there is, in fact, no greater wisdom in saying that the goal of painting is to produce 'significant form' than in saying that the goal of music or architecture is to produce representative effect." Using as an example the triforium of Notre Dame, he plays with this fancy to bring out what he calls "the opposite and correlative error" to the "significant form" error.

Werkmeister in *A Philosophy of Science* lifts the subject to a higher plane than that of clever disagreement when he speaks of the resurrection of faith in mathematics which he attributes to Leonardo da Vinci. He quotes da Vinci:

"Necessity is the mistress and protectress, the sustainer and discoverer of Nature; it is Nature's eternal bond and law." If Nature has thus assigned this role to necessity, it is perhaps traceable to the fact that we have to differentiate among matters; we cannot always have things run smoothly and our vicissitudes are strongly accented. Were it not for the contrasts of rain and sunshine, sorrow and pleasure, life would lose its savor and interest for us. Leonardo was quite right in his eloquence about necessity.

Esthetics goes back to Greek civilization, but the Greeks often chose a figurative or mythological way of presenting their thoughts on art. Instead of giving us Kantian formulae or Crocean lucubrations, the Greeks gave us the lovely myth of the Nine Muses, daughters of Zeus, who dwelt by the Pierian Spring on Mount Olympus. How refreshing it is instead of abstract thoughts about the various arts to think of Thalia when one thinks of comedy, or Terpsichore when one thinks of dancing, or Polyhymnia when one contemplates eloquence. Indeed it is a pleasure simply to call the roll of the Muses: Urania for astronomy, Calliope for epic poetry, Clio for history, Erato for erotic poetry, Euterpe for lyric poetry, and Melpomene for tragedy. I wonder how many of my readers can recite the list of the Nine Muses. May I recommend recalling them when one gets tied up in too many mental knots about esthetics?

It is the contention of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* writer on esthetics that the Roman Emperors of the Fifth and Sixth Centuries had no regard for Greek culture and that Justinian I contracted Hellenism by the measures he took. Then came a record of barbarian invasions. But let us not forget that Greek culture drew from prehistoric and alien sources for its decorative expression; it certainly drew from Egyptian and Babylonian sources.

I have reserved the gigantic figure of Tolstoi for the close of this essay, though it was a temptation to conclude with the gentle figure of Henri Frederic Amiel, who was

during the Nineteenth Century professor of esthetics at the Academy of Geneva. In my view, however, there should be no forcing of the arts on the young. I have a homely name for my theory of education explained in another essay where I call it the "chess and checkers theory." I mean simply that if a child shows talent in art, or even some interest in it, he should by all means be encouraged to go to exhibitions and to museums. Similarly, if talented in music, opportunities to hear fine radio music or to go to the opera or to concerts should be lavished on the child. But the child should be the final judge of his likes and inclinations, and there should be no forcing of the arts on him if he is rebellious. Forcing may instil a lifetime repugnance for art. For this reason it seems fitting not to conclude with a professor of esthetics, but with Tolstoi, whose challenge is so strong that we must really get down to the bedrock of our beliefs.

The *Encyclopedia Britannica* summary of Tolstoi's *What is Art?* can hardly be bettered. "Tolstoi sets forth his own view that art is a human activity which aims at the transmission of emotion. He proceeds to demand that the emotions shall be actually felt and shall belong to the highest feelings to which man can rise. True art must appeal to the religious perception of the brotherhood of man, and it must find universal response. He asserts that exclusive art is bad art, and that subjects like sexual love, patriotism and religious devotion should be avoided."

Tolstoi gives us a brief history of the main teachings of leading estheticians. The founder of esthetics was Baumgarten, 1714-1762, who taught that the object of esthetic knowledge is beauty. "Beauty," says Tolstoi in summarizing Baumgarten, "is the perfect (the absolute) recognized through the senses; truth is the perfect perceived through reason; goodness is the perfect reached by moral will." Then Tolstoi takes up Sulzer, Mendelssohn and Moritz who contradict Baumgarten and declare that the aim of art is not beauty but goodness. Mendelssohn flatly declared that the



aim of art is moral perfection—a beautiful soul in a beautiful body. Then came Winckelmann, who declared that the law and aim of all art is beauty only, beauty quite separated from and independent of goodness. “The beauty of expression is the highest aim of art, and is attained in antique art; modern art should aim at imitating ancient art”—a thought I connect with the Pre-Raphaelites. Then Tolstoi summed up Kant’s esthetics: “the judging capacity, which forms judgments without reasoning and produces pleasure without desire.”

It seems to me, after reading Tolstoi’s essay many times, that it still remains an open question whether Baumgarten’s theory is sound. Is knowledge beauty? Knowledge alone might be the most beautiful achievement to some people. Yet knowledge in a perverted and evil person can be used by him to destroy great masses of mankind and set humanity on a wrong track. I cannot consider knowledge alone beautiful. Moreover, superficial knowledge is a curse. As Pope said, “A little learning is a dangerous thing. Drink deep or taste not the Pierian Spring.” Baumgarten asserts that knowledge is beauty and beauty is perfection recognized through the senses. Since knowledge and beauty deal with the sense, knowledge is not always perfect, nor is beauty. Beauty may be skin-deep. Put the beautiful skin of a child beneath a magnifying glass and what will be perceived? Ugly pores. But beauty in goodness, sometimes called moral beauty—to see that is a higher attainment; it approaches perfection, according to Plato.

On one point I agree with Baumgarten. Nature is highly beautiful but I must register objection to his conclusion that therefore the highest aim of art is to copy Nature. I rather share the point of view of Sulzer, Mendelssohn and Moritz; yet these estheticians err when they say that the aim of art is not beauty but goodness. If we mean by goodness any theory of the ego and love, then we run into problems and difficulties which I have discussed at



Figure 1. An example of early "Impressionism" (Spanish, early Seventeenth Century)  
*Christ and the Pilgrims at Emmaus* by Velasquez  
(Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art)



Figure 2. An example of early "Impressionism" (Dutch, Seventeenth Century)  
*The Merry Company* by Franz Hals  
(Museum of Art)



Figure 1. An example of Eighteenth Century "Impressionism"  
*A Carnival Scene* by Goya  
(In the Prado, Madrid)



Figure 4. An example of late Nineteenth Century "Impressionism"  
*Rouen Cathedral* by Claude Monet  
(Metropolitan Museum of Art)

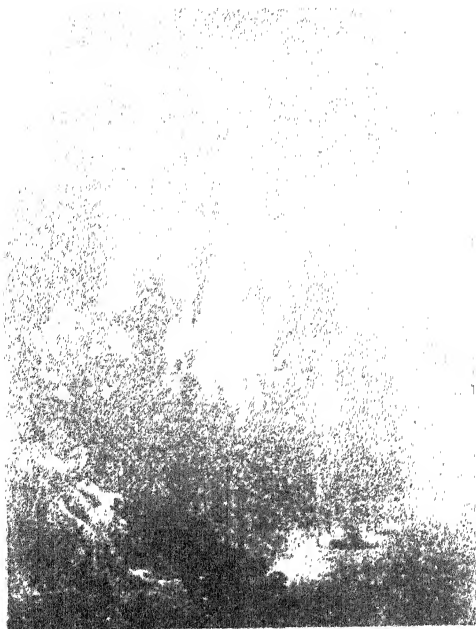


Figure 16. *The Descent from  
the Cross* by Peter Paul Rubens  
after the 1609-10 engravings.



Figure 7.

Wooden Figure from Tomb  
Coast, West Africa

Courtesy, Metropolitan Museum of Art,  
Image of the Day, 2010

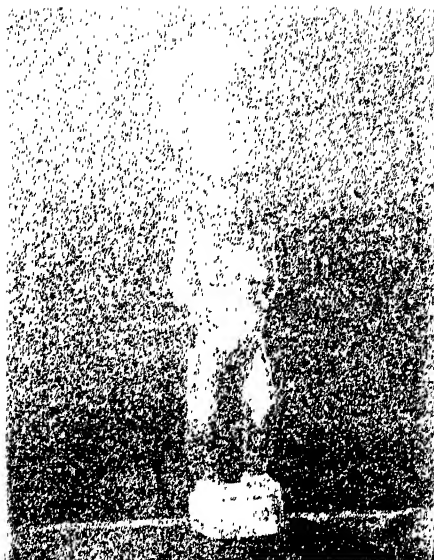


Figure 8.

*The Young Maid*  
by Amadeo Modigliani

Courtesy, Allright Art Gallery, Buffalo, N. Y.



Figure 10.  
*Portrait of Mr. X*  
By Georges Rouault

(Courtesy, Bright Art Gallery,  
Buffalo, N. Y.)





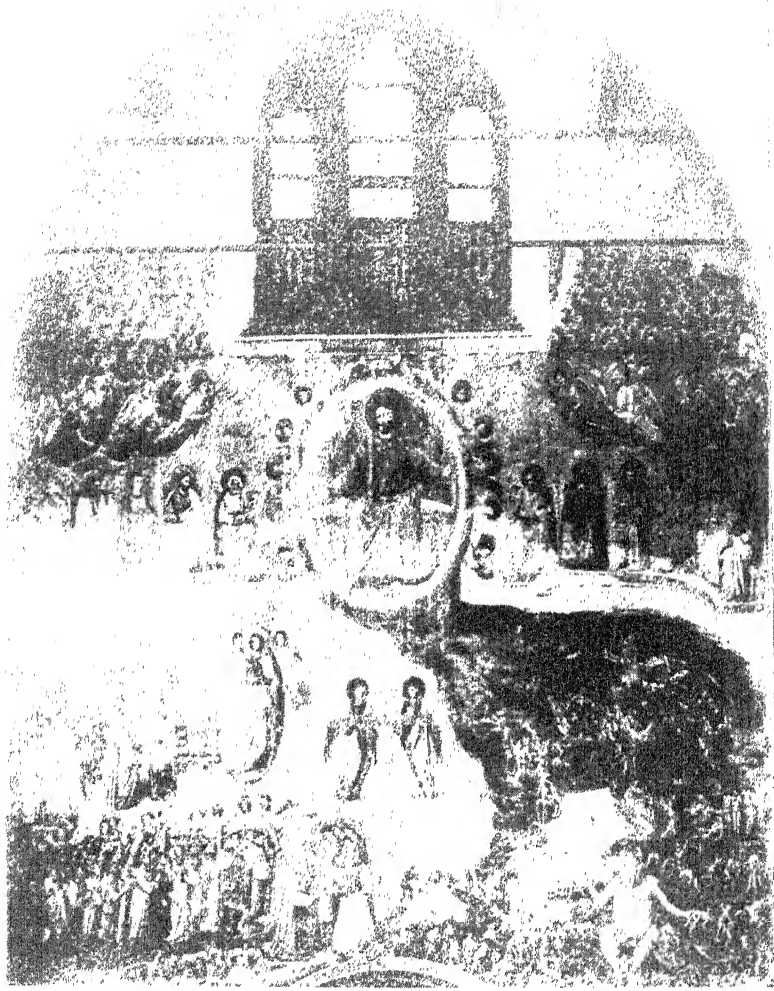


Figure 11. *The Final Judgment* by Giotto (circa 1266-1336)  
(Arena Chapel, Padua)

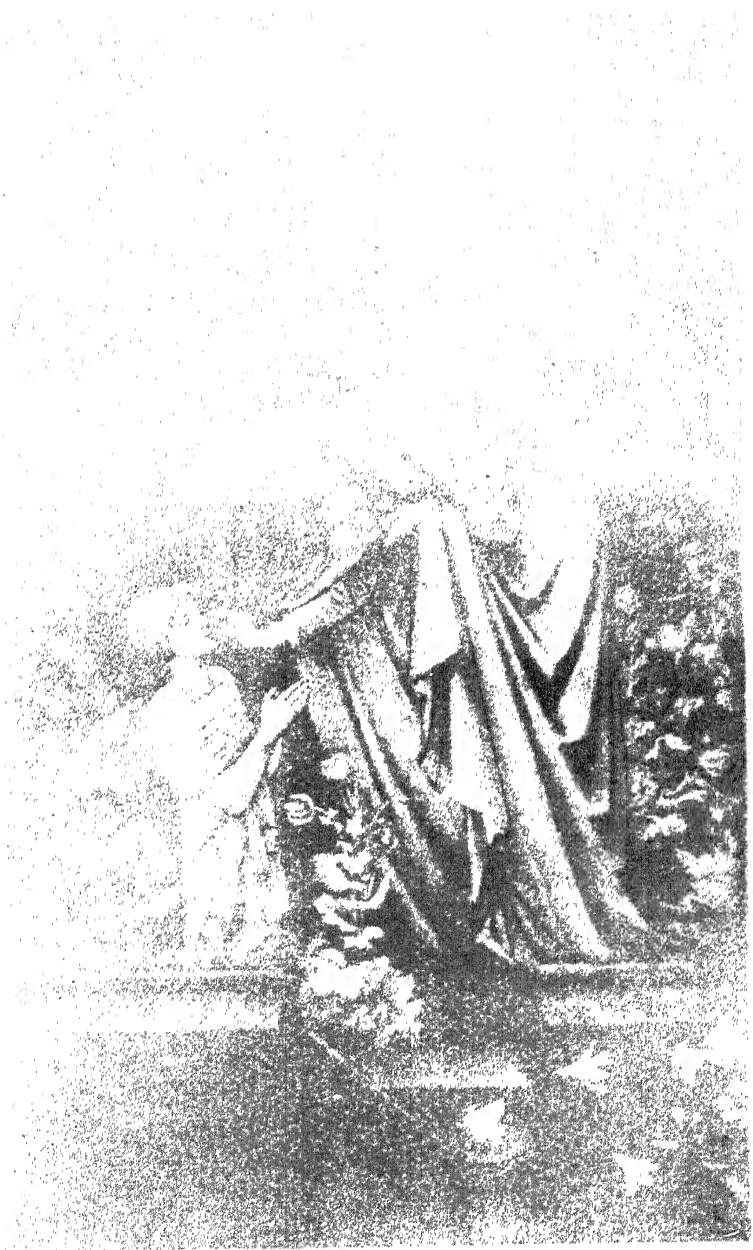


Fig. 12 An example of English Nineteenth Century Pre-Raphaelite art  
*The Prioresse's Tale* by Sir Edward Burne-Jones



Figure 13. *Gaulthier, London* by Joseph Mallord William Turner, R.A.  
(The Author's collection)

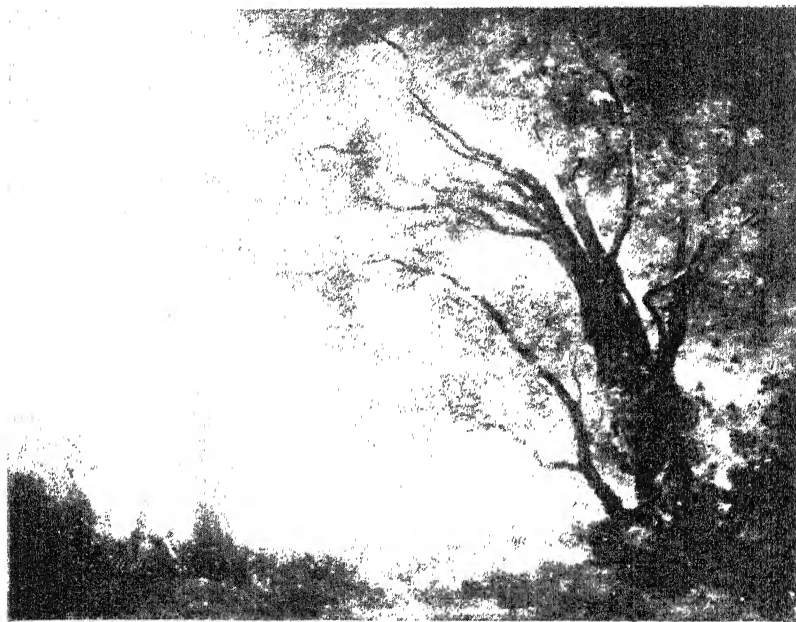


Figure 14. *Landscape* by Jean Baptiste Camille Corot  
(In the Louvre, Paris)



Figure 15a  
Example of "Non-Objectivity"  
Composition by Picasso

(in the Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Figure 15a  
Example of "Non-Objectivity"  
*Composition* by Picasso  
(in the Museum of Modern Art, New York)

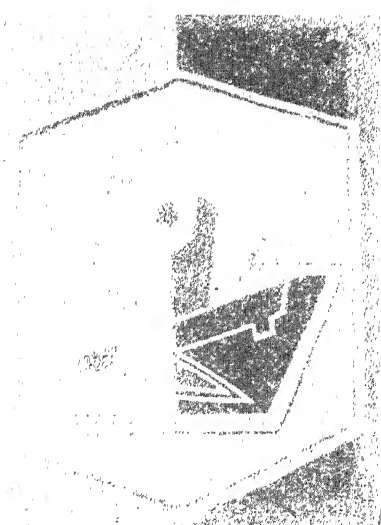




Figure 17. *The Laocöon* by El Greco  
(Collection of Prince Paul of Yugoslavia)



Figure 18. *The Bathers* by Paul Cézanne  
(Courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art)



Fig. 19.  
*Primavera*  
by Sandro Botticelli  
(in the Uffizi Gallery)

Fig. 20.  
*Spring*  
by Botticelli  
(in the Florence Academy)





Figure 21.  
*Baby with Doll*  
 Alfred Stieglitz, American  
 (1846-1916)  
 Collection of Museum of Modern Art, New York  
 Gift of John D. Rockefeller, Jr.

Figure 22.  
*Child with Doll*  
 By Henri Rousseau  
 (late Nineteenth Century)  
 Collection of Museum of Modern Art  
 Collection of Mrs. Paul Guggenheim,  
 Paris



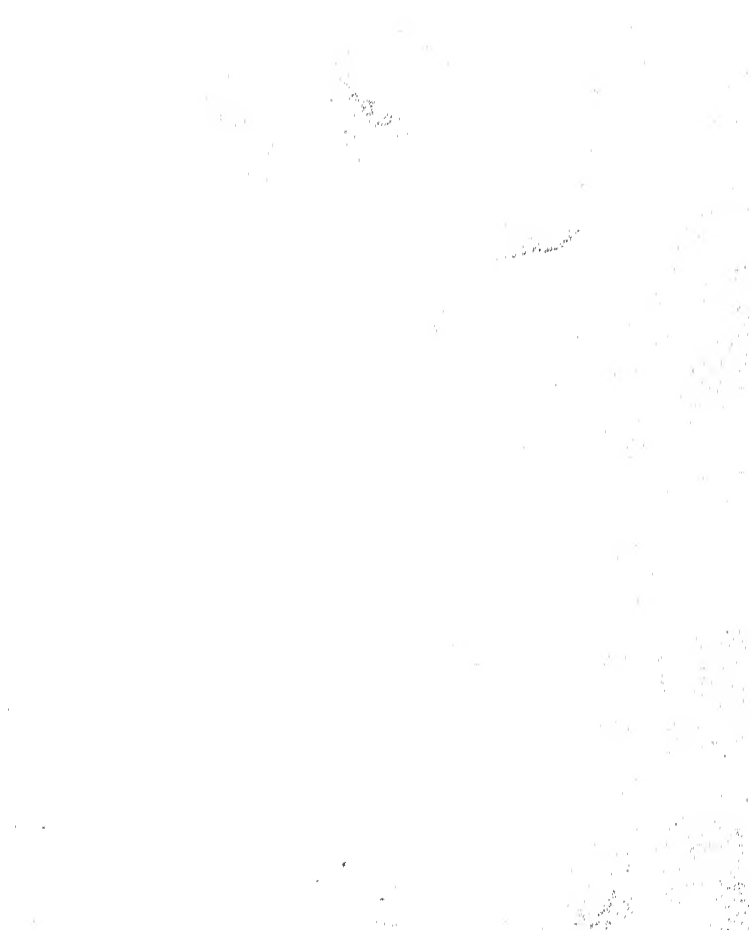


Figure 27. *Portrait of a Woman* drawing by Leonardo da Vinci  
(U. Windsor Castle)



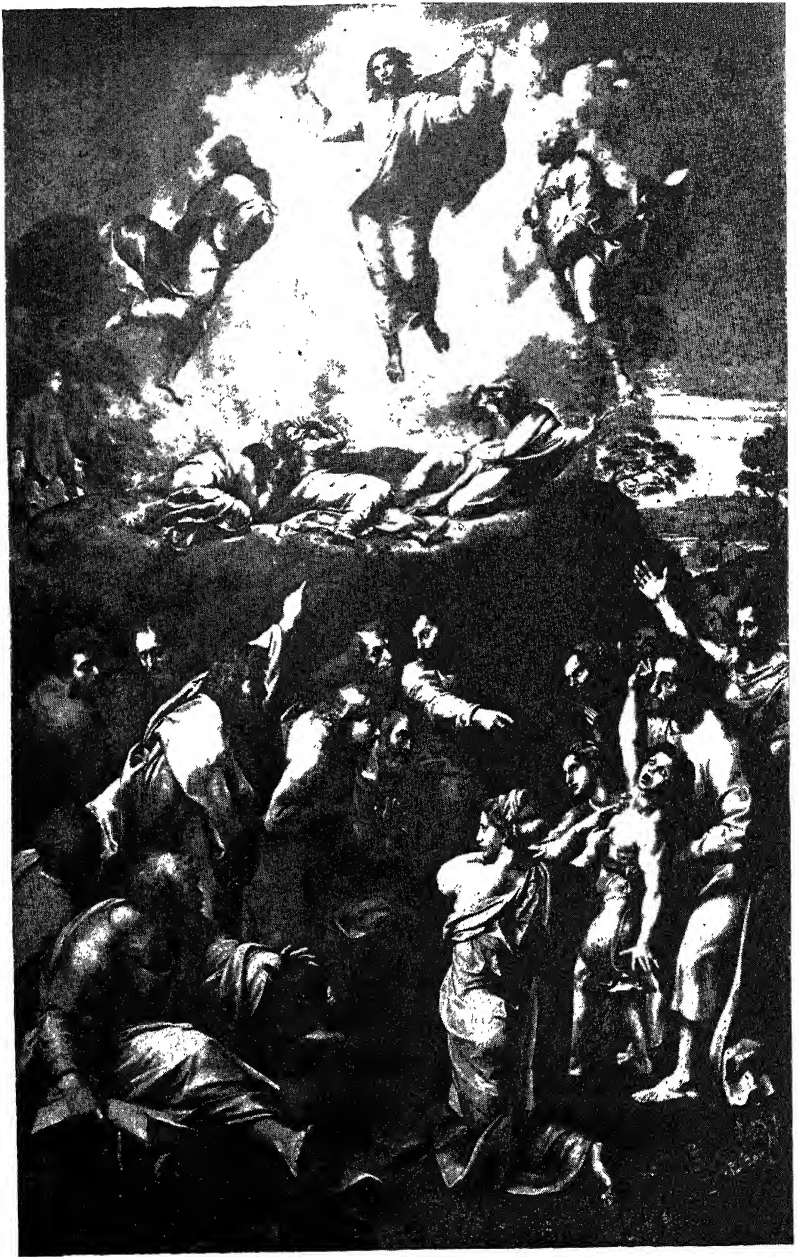


Figure 24. *The Transfiguration* by Raphael  
(In the Vatican)

length elsewhere in this book. Finally, I cannot accept Winckelmann's theory that the law and aim of art is beauty alone. What may be beautiful to one is not to someone else; that is the simple well-known fact upon which this theory breaks.

Beauty by itself is relative. That is not to say, however, that the imaginative quality of beauty is not a greater factor in art, for by it we can portray abstractions from Nature by means of the spirit of beauty. Winckelmann stresses the separation of beauty from goodness. I cannot see why a work of art cannot exemplify and fuse both beauty and goodness.

Winckelmann classifies beauty into three kinds, beauty of form, beauty of idea, and beauty of expression, the third being obtainable when the first two conditions are fulfilled. This I accept, but with all these theories there is a stumbling block. That stumbling block is the insistence coupled with them that it is the attainments of antique art toward which we should strive and that modern art should be imitative of ancient art. If Winckelmann meant something like the practice of the Pre-Raphaelites, who received their inspiration from ancient art and made abstractions from ancient art, then well and good. Otherwise, let us say, down with the imitative art which Plato so strongly condemned as a mere mimicry of Nature.



Part III

THE UNENDING SEARCH



## Chapter IX

### IN QUEST OF THE MEANING OF ART

WHEN WE PAINTERS read the philosophers, what is it we are searching for? We are looking for the meaning of art and we consult those who have specialized on the meaning of life which includes that most vivid expression of life we call art. Not many years ago a professor at New York University, Dr. A. Philip McMahon, well read in philosophy, conducted a systematic discussion of the meaning of art in a book which he called simply *The Meaning of Art*. His book makes an excellent point of departure for the important task of clarifying one's own mind on this subject. In my case, I find Dr. McMahon stimulating me to disagreement, and this essay will be in part a brief or refutation of some of his points of view.

On page 38 of *The Meaning of Art* Dr. McMahon raises the question popularized by Goethe and Croce, Is art to be tested by its intention? He points out that Aristotle, Horace, Wordsworth and Arnold have all held that the purpose of poetry is ethical, whereas the romantic school, Hegel and Schopenhauer maintain that art purifies all that it touches.

Despite the authorities paraded before us, the point still seems moot to me. Poetry can be unethical and yet be described as good poetry. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* contains many unethical expressions, yet literary critics are unanimous in praising it as great poetry. Or the poetry of Solomon's *Song of Songs*—it is admittedly great but a judge of ethics would boggle at some of it. Unethical expressions are frequent in our modern trend of thought. I am forced to conclude that when we call poetry good or great, we are

referring to its poetic quality, not to its ethical content. Everyone knows that we may have a didactic highly ethical poem that is poorly written and dies because of that fact. Of course, we would prefer the ethical poetry of an ethical poet.

On another page (79), Dr. McMahon quotes Santayana who quotes Spinoza who said that we desire nothing because it is good, but it is good only because we desire it. My comment is that when we are surfeited in our desires, we cease to appreciate the objects of our desire. They become good to us when our desires are unfulfilled and either sharpened by the spirit of competition or whetted by the scarcity-value of the object. It is questionable whether goodness by itself is not relative, a delusion of the desiring ego.

On page 112, Dr. McMahon arrives at Oscar Wilde's familiar paradox that Nature always imitates art, and gives landscape gardening as an illustration of the paradox. After all, the gardener arranging his landscape receives his material from Nature. Without this material he could not create his garden. Beyond that, the mind of the gardener is dictated by Nature to make this arrangement. Here is a suggestion for Pantheism. This stirs me to remark that according to Pantheism we emanate from Nature and Nature emanates from us. We are subjugated by Nature. Through Nature herself, we are endowed with artistic gifts, and since Nature endows us, it may be said that she controls our mind and our destiny.

Proceeding further in Dr. McMahon's book, we find him giving on page 142 a resumé of the Neo-Platonist answer to the quest for the meaning of art. That answer in the briefest possible form is that art is a revelation of the domination of Nature by mind. I cannot accept the Neo-Platonic point of view. As I have said in another essay as well as in this one, human mind is subjugated to Nature or some other power that rules our destiny. We often prove inferior in strength to the microscopic germ that overwhelms us. We

prove again and again helpless before the convulsions and calamities of Nature. Nature even has the power to smash our planet and destroy all life on it. Let some cosmic operation occur and the very air we breathe can be made unfit and in a few minutes all would die.

How can mind control Nature? As the generations pass, we cannot even be certain, in spite of our inventions, whether the race is becoming stronger or weaker mentally. The knowledge of centuries accumulates but mental power is something else. Supposing that the Greek philosophers were living among us today, would our minds be on a par with theirs? Athens was not much larger than Rhode Island, yet it produced twenty-seven mental giants, an overwhelming proportion to the rest of the world. We have great reason to be humble in our estimates of ourselves.

I have two more bones of contention to pick with Dr. McMahon's book, one on page 149 where he speaks of the Hermes by Praxiteles, and one on page 159 where he discusses form and feeling. The second passage also speaks of the Hermes. Dr. McMahon raises the question of the economic value of the Hermes and I should like to observe that economic value depends on demand and on propaganda or advertising to enhance the demand. Dr. McMahon has made the point that there never was such a man as Hermes or such a divinity, and it is true that Praxiteles conceived Hermes as a visionary idea incorporated in stone. The creation of his imagination can be attributed to the formalist's idealistic conception of the Platonic period; matter was considered illusory and idealism was real. Tangible things like the stone of Praxiteles are nothing else but that which is perceptible to our senses. It is only vital to us when through our senses we grasp its significance. Matter is certainly needed; even a creation by Shakespeare or Ibsen without pen and ink could not exist for us. But it is the psychological or idealistic concepts of creators, the intangible



things, that the world considers great philosophy or great art and thinks about and analyzes.

Practically all writers on the meaning of art bring up, as does Dr. McMahon, the names of Aristotle and Plato. Lionello Venturi in his *History of Art Criticism* believes that Plato and Aristotle vacillated between the theory of beauty and the theory of art, without letting them coincide. Surely Plato did not vacillate but worked out a consistent relationship of the good, the beautiful and the true. Someone has said of Croce that he shows that philosophy cannot exist without art but that art, occupying the lower place, can exist without philosophy. This is a very suggestive thought. We can say the same thing of the relationship of philosophy and science. By itself philosophy has been of limited benefit to mankind, but coupled with science philosophy has helped to solve many problems. Art is certainly a powerful asset for philosophy.

Having spoken of science, let us turn to it and particularly to psychology to see what light we can get on the meaning of art. I shall make reference to three books: *The Wholesome Personality* by William H. Burnham, *A Philosophy of Science* by W. H. Werkmeister, and *Art and the Unconscious* by John M. Thorburn. Burnham brings in Taine on the ego and the time element, but the difficulty here for a practising painter thinking about art's meaning is that the ego, which includes the vast study of self-gratification, is a most abstruse subject to deal with. We are greatly handicapped in that our vocabulary is inadequate for the shades of meaning required. Some day in the future we may have added to our verbal resources words that are more precise, more delicate, or more expressive for this field, but we are verbally limited now, as I have pointed out in an earlier chapter.

In passing, though, I must comment on Burnham's statement that self-love in children always craves admiration, and when this self-love reaches an extreme, it is known to psychi-

atry as Narcissism. It is quite true that self-love in children does always crave admiration. This self-love, it would appear, is the nucleus of the development of human nature. The ego in a child or an adult is a great stimulus for maximizing one's gifts. Yes, it is selfish, but frequently the results of this selfishness benefit mankind.

Werkmeister, writing on the dawn of science, makes much of the triumph of scholasticism which curbed and subdued the spirit of experimentation manifested by Albertus Magnus and Roger Bacon. Of course, art like science also found itself proceeding from some accepted dogma or tenet of faith. It was, in fact, dictated by the Church, and the artist had to follow the dictates of Holy Writ and shut his eyes to the truth when it was contradicted by the Bible. The artist's own observation had to be subordinate. Nevertheless, although submerged in piety, geniuses abounded and creative ideas sprang up. Masterpieces were bequeathed to posterity to spread a gospel of inspiration and to refine the human soul. It seems not to be a question whether scholastic wisdom was right or wrong *per se*. What it did was to strengthen the illusion of the concept of religious art, and those who came under this illusion do not seem to have had their creative vitality lessened. Werkmeister, by the way, makes the claim that Aristotle was the first to raise vitalism to the status of a philosophical doctrine.

It is almost inevitable that all discussions of art's meaning, if they do not start with Plato, end with him, and it is to Plato in his famous cave after which he wrote the tenth book of *The Republic* that Thorburn brings us at the end of this essay. Science tells us that we earth creatures begin as a single microscopic cell. One great scientist once calculated that a teapot could have contained the single microscopic cells of all the animals and plants on the earth. A thimbleful of the one-celled beginnings of trees would be quite sufficient to reforest all the land of the United States. Regardless of how much we progress, we humans are definitely

limited. We can fly six miles up in the sky, but we cannot retain consciousness much above that distance. At these heights aviators have to resort to special oxygen apparatus. Nature will not let us overstep the limits she has established. What has this to do with Plato? Simply this: while Nature has fixed limits for us and controls our destiny, within those limits man can create gloriously, can think almost divinely.

Philosophers like artists are dreamers, whether they dream by night or day. The great artist's imagination is like a dream, and his mind like the philosopher's absorbs its abstractions from Nature, whether like Plato he conceives them from his own beautiful shadows in the cave or from other phenomena. Visual or imaginative form is built upon his creative thought, thereby communicating his imaginative quality to others for their inspiration.

Though Plato was seemingly hostile to art, because he thought it imitative of Nature, he had a powerful indirect artistic inclination. His inspiration for *The Republic* came from his visualization in the cave. In the enjoyment of the seductive tranquility of this cave, he responded at once to the mental vision he beheld. Whether it be as a philosophic tract or as a subconscious artistic expression, the message of *The Republic* has been disseminated to the whole world, and after centuries this message still shines as a masterpiece of thought, regardless of whether it is accepted or rejected by modern canons of reality.

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## Chapter X

### A PAINTER AMONG THE PHILOSOPHERS

ALTHOUGH I DO NOT BELIEVE that philosophy alone has ever solved any great problem, I have spent many, many profitable hours with the books of philosophers, especially with Plato, Epictetus, Kant and Hegel. For Friedrich Nietzsche, for whom there was a cult some years ago until the Nazis began to praise him, I feel little enthusiasm although I may agree with some of his ideas. I do not like his emphasis upon egoism nor his view that self-denial is a form of cowardice, and of course his view that the strong should dominate the weak is repugnant, unless they do so by virtue of the strength of their mental superiority.

I have sometimes tried to imagine in what other period than his own Plato would have felt at home, and it seems to me he would have liked the intellectual climate of the Thirteenth or Fourteenth Centuries in Europe because of prevailing religious idealism. A case can be made out for a parallelism of the Catholic religion with its concepts of heaven and hell and Plato's Republic. Furthermore, Plato himself was undoubtedly influenced by the monotheism of Socrates, which might well have been based on the religion of the Hebrews.

In *The Republic* Plato says, "The soul has virtue and vice, that is, harmony and discord. Is there harmony of harmony?" For myself, I am reconciled to the co-existence of goodness and badness. If there were goodness only, we could not differentiate. The beautiful and the ugly also co-exist. Nature gives us sunshine and rain, and after a spell of continuous rain, how grateful we are for the sunshine! The cloud's silver lining is a profound symbol of the dif-

ferentiations we make between good and bad, the beautiful and the ugly. Plato regarded moral beauty as the highest achievement, and visible beauty as the shadow.

It is by speculating on the nature of the beautiful and the ugly that most artists, I suppose, are drawn to the abstract questions of philosophy. And to the artist Plato is ever fascinating. This is because while he appears to be against poetry and would have banished poets from his Republic, he yet mixes poetry with his philosophy to a charming degree. I wonder how much Plato's animus against the poets influenced other manifestations of puritanism in the world's history. For instance, the early Christians objected to the theater as immoral. The practical Romans had another reason for objecting to the theater; satirical dramatists mocked the citizens of Rome, and in our vernacular today, "they couldn't take it." On top of these tendencies was the ancient Jewish condemnation of the use of images in worship, though the ancient Hebrews were highly poetic, so Plato is not alone in his distrust of poetry, if we use that term in a broad sense to mean art.

Yet how paradoxical Plato is! His system was founded upon desire with its seat in the loins, emotion which he situated in the blood, and knowledge with its seat in the head. Knowledge, he felt could be the eye of desire and the pilot of the soul. He preached against art and its sensuousness, yet he encouraged the fire mysteries. And always he kept returning to the question of the beautiful which is one reason why we artists keep returning to his *Dialogues*. What does love desire of the beautiful? he asked. Is not possession enough? To this he gave the answer that there is one kind of love—we call it "being in love"—which desires beauty for a peculiar end. The lover is not seeking his "other half" but is seeking the possession of the beautiful and birth in beauty. Human nature longs to create and, save in the presence of beauty, it cannot. To Plato this yearning to create is an earnest of immortality.

Plato extolled the love of fame and boldly affirmed that creative souls were primarily concerned with bringing into being not offspring of the body but good deeds. It was not so much procreation as creation that the noble creative person desired.

One of Plato's most adventurous thoughts is his conception of pre-existence. He maintained that the mind possesses the power to draw up from the depths of the psyche conceptions of ideas that cannot be explained by our experiences after birth. He argues that these must come from a previous existence, which is the formalist's conception.

Since I hold that truth is a relative term, to a certain extent varying from person to person, I am an eclectic in my browsing among the philosophers. A sunset too is a relative thing; it depends on how to see it. Plato called beauty the splendor of truth, and splendor, like a sunset, depends on who sees it and how.

Another ancient philosopher from whose spring I have drunk frequently is Epictetus. Has he been properly appreciated? Take such a saying as this: "Each man has within him a guardian spirit, a God within him, who never sleeps; so that even in darkness and solitude we are never alone, because God is within our guardian spirit." Does this saying not indicate that Epictetus might be called the father of Pantheism, even though he was unaware of founding a school? At any rate, it seems to me that the later pantheists, Spinoza, Descartes and others, owe a debt, direct or indirect, to Epictetus.

Here is another saying of Epictetus: "Two maxims we must ever bear in mind: that apart from the will there is nothing either good or bad, and that we must not try to anticipate direct events, but merely accept them with intelligence." This is so similar to Shakespeare's saying that "there is nothing good or bad in this world but thinking makes it so" that Shakespeare might almost be accused of plagiarizing Epictetus. There is of course a similarity in

great minds. Everyone knows Christ's Golden Rule: "Do unto others as ye would have them do unto you," but how many know that Confucius said the same thing expressed negatively? Some people have attributed Christ's rule to Confucius. Historians and critics mislead us sometimes.

I have just quoted Shakespeare and of course he belongs in an essay on philosophers just as well as in an essay about dramatists, so comprehensive was his genius. "Self-love, my liege," wrote Shakespeare, "is not so vile a sin as self-neglecting," and to me that is a comment on true egoism that is worth all of Nietzsche's ranting about the dominating egoist.

Skipping the centuries from Plato and Epictetus to Kant, I think the sentence in *The Critique of Pure Reason* I most value is this: "The life of man is dual. It consists of two lives: one animal and one spiritual." Ruskin expressed himself in the Kantian manner when he wrote: "I live in two worlds, the physical and the spiritual."

As is well known, some of Kant's philosophy was called Transcendentalism and maintained that everything is known to us through our senses. It is based upon time and space.

One of the supreme expressions of what Kant and Ruskin were driving at in the quotations above was given by the great Chinese philosopher Lao-tse, who said: "The vase molded out of clay would be useless but for the empty space left for its contents; this shows that however beneficial the material may be to us, without the immaterial it would be useless."

Hegel, with his dialectic, is another philosophic writer who has long stimulated my mind. His conception of morality, in my judgment, is the morality of belief in Christ, superseding any other morality. (Parenthetically, I would like to observe that superstitions as well as beliefs can be conducive to the happiness of those who fall under the sway of one or another religious fanaticism.)

Hegel is famous for two things: his idealism and his

dialectic. He held that the external and the spiritual worlds have the same origin but are not co-equal branches. The natural world he traced to the "idea"; the spiritual world, he said, came from the idea and Nature. He argued that consciousness or at least the potentiality of consciousness must have been present from the first. Beginning with the natural world alone it is impossible, Hegel argued, to explain the mind by any process of development. His conclusion was that at the base of all reality, whether material or mental, there was thought, the stuff of which both mind and nature are made.

John Dewey has something to say that I think is to the point here. "Morality," he points out, "is in no way a work of Nature. It is the achievement of self-conscious reason of man through conquest of Nature. The ideal of final harmony remains, but it is an ideal to be won through a battle with the natural forces of man."

Quite as much attention has been paid to Hegel's dialectic, his formula of the thesis, antithesis and synthesis which Karl Marx took over to found his socialist theory. Every reality, said Hegel, has three aspects or stages: an affirmation (thesis), a negation (antithesis), and a synthesis (sometimes called the negation of the negation). His whole theory can be summed up as saying that this world is a world of reason, and reason is the essential nature of reality.

That artists in one medium or another benefit from immersion in philosophy at certain times is, I think, unquestionable. Certainly that is true of the composer Wagner. If the reader will grant me leave to illustrate my contention by referring to one of my own paintings, I would like to speak of my painting inspired by the Prelude to Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* which is an abstraction of the spirit of his story. (See frontispiece.) It is intertwined with the old philosophical riddles of love and death.

It would seem that Nature with her mysterious laws and



cosmic formulae has no desire whatever of revealing to man her purpose in the destruction of human life. Certainly the human race cannot apprehend or grasp the significance of the wholesale destruction of human beings that visits our planet. We see wars, pestilences, epidemics, earthquakes and other upheavals destroying life on a large scale, but we also see Nature replenishing mankind in her own way, stimulating human sexual impulses for the propagation of the race and inducing love among the sons and daughters of men.

It is notable that the survivors of volcanic eruptions and earthquakes instead of moving away cling tenaciously to the devastated areas. Nature entices them to stay with a new fertility of the land, and frequently an area visited by catastrophe becomes more populated than ever. Love is indeed the partner of Death and together they move mankind to progress or decadence at Nature's will and, it almost seems, whim.

When we read in the newspaper or hear over the radio of the annihilation of a thousand or ten thousand or even fifty thousand human beings through the action of Nature's terrible elements or through war, we are shocked and grieved. But please note that we do not think of each dead person individually. We as individuals think of these fifty thousand or more dead as one body—as a "gestalt"—akin to the human body. The human body, of course, is composed of connected and adjacent cells, whereas the body or "gestalt" of the fifty thousand is composed of separate units. Just as we do not dwell on each cell or organ of the human body, but treat it as a whole, so do we think collectively of a body of fifty thousand dead. Nature has given us a mental and physical make-up that is incapable of giving individual attention to each of these fifty thousand dead. Thus in life and death and even in memory, we really think of them as a body or unit. In the final analysis, it is not millions mourning the fifty thousand; it is one human being as a unit mourning one unit of fifty thousand.

Nature employs the mysterious medium of time to heal our suffering and to soften and erase from our memory the shock of the most dreadful catastrophes and even of our most personal losses. In the hour of distress when we feel grief-stricken and hopeless, if only we could shift time ahead to that future hour when our wounds have been healed, when we can smile again and enjoy our pleasures! Why Nature does not permit this traveling in time as we travel through space is her secret; perhaps it is a way of making death as-solemn as possible and safeguarding mankind as a precious thing by so doing. Perhaps we shall never be able to solve the mystery of time, the probable fourth dimension, as we have conquered space.

Emerson and others have touched on Nature's law of compensation. When we are really enjoying life, time passes quickly. Pleasure in excess is injurious, as we all know, and this no doubt is why life is so arranged that small allotments of pleasure look like the luxuries of Nature. Nature or some other mysterious power controls our race's destiny and we are not the masters of our fate.

I have been led into these reflections by thinking of Wagner who was a genius but, even so, his music seems to soar far above him. "Genius is the inspired gift of God," said Carlyle. Perhaps Wagner's earthly mission was to develop the spiritual quality of music so that our enjoyment of it might be truly religious. He achieves that miraculous level that Thomas Paine was trying to indicate when he remarked that "a step above the ridiculous is the sublime, and a step above the sublime is the ridiculous." Genius appears to be a product of Nature intended to create works for the benefit of mankind just as other products of Nature are destructive forces that neutralize the efforts of genius. Nature ordains that the human race should have privileges but should not overstep them, which again relates to Paine's insight on the near proximity above and below of the ridiculous to the sublime.

One thing must be evident from the direction of my thought in this essay and that is that the writer takes exception to Keats' oft-quoted lines: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty, that is all ye know on earth and all ye need to know."

Take a person who is concealed from your vision. The truth may be that this person is ugly, deformed and shabbily dressed. The surroundings may be most attractive, but it is assumed that you are blindfolded or for some other reason cannot see the person. Now if this person should speak with a charming voice, utter noble sentiments, and so on, would you not form a certain high estimate of the person? Or conversely, the hidden person might be well dressed and handsome in appearance, but if that person had a peacock's voice and uttered disagreeable words, you would consider the concealed person to be unacceptable in contrast with the ugly but pleasant speaking person. Those familiar with the paintings of Millet will see the bearing of this observation on the workings of the artistic imagination. His figures harmonize with Nature. If Millet had put into his rustic landscape figures like those of Watteau or Fragonard (though these two painters are masters in their own sphere of concept), the effect would have been grotesque.

Browsing among the philosophers gives one a renewed sense of the miracles of living. Among these miracles is art. Consider a simple sheet of paper. It has an interesting history from wood pulp to the retail store where you bought it, yet, unless it is used, it is nothing. Put a few words on it, how potent it can become! It may give forth eloquence, the few words may even change the destiny of man. Or consider a piece of stone. Let a master sculptor work on it, and it becomes capable of giving a tremendous experience to the onlooker. Or take a piece of canvas costing some insignificant sum, which can carry a message from a painter that will stir the world for centuries. These inanimate objects—the paper, the stone, the canvas—have been invested with the powers of the human mind and spirit; they may date way

back and will speak to distant posterity. They carry messages to please and enlighten men and messages of tragedy that plunge us into deep pessimism. Art like philosophy is one of the great arms of the human spirit and there should be communion between philosophers and artists.

It seems to me that the following lines from Alfred B. Street's *Natural History* make a good link between art and philosophy :

Nature is man's best teacher. She unfolds  
Her treasures to his search, unseals his eye,  
Illumes his mind, and purifies his heart—  
An influence breathes from all the sights and sounds  
Of her existence; she is wisdom's self.

As a sobering reflection, let me close by saying that man is capable of analyzing the chemical constituency of an acorn but he cannot create this acorn by planting these chemical compositions in the earth. They will not become the seed of an oak tree. But by planting the acorn itself, the tree will come about under man's eye. Nature will not allow men to supersede her in her creative powers.

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## Chapter XI

### A PAINTER AMONG THE PSYCHOLOGISTS

IN A COMPANION ESSAY I have roved among the philosophers asking them the questions that lie on a painter's mind and pondering their answers. In this essay I shall drop my palette and brushes, leave the studio, and go visiting among the psychologists in their laboratories, clinics and lecture-rooms. But I shall take with me on my visits the problems and enigmas that have occupied my mind as I have reflected on the significances of art to mankind.

Many experiments are made in the psychological laboratory that are most interesting to one like myself whose life has been devoted to a study of color. Many times the psychologist approaches color in a negative fashion; that is, he is fascinated by the problem of color-blindness. The Ishihara test is a good example of laboratory ingenuity. Magazines of large circulation have popularized this test, and you have probably taken it yourself. A mosaic of tiny colored circles is offered to a subject, and he is asked to show what sort of figure he sees in this mosaic. If he is normal, he will see a certain figure, but if he is color-blind, he will report that he sees an entirely different figure or pattern in the mosaic.

Writers on esthetics, ignoring the color-blind, argue whether certain colors in themselves are beautiful or not. Venturi, for example, has been known to say that the color black is not beautiful, but if black is put in the right place in a picture, the picture is nevertheless beautiful. I imagine the psychologist might object to Venturi's dogmatism about black. Certainly to us of the western world, the color black is psychologically potent; it is a reminder of death. How

relative such a matter is, one can see at once by thinking of the Chinese to whom white is the color of mourning. But are black and white colors at all? You will find that some people do not consider them to be colors. For myself, I regard black as a dissonant color, and dissonances are indispensable both in painting and in music to create pleasing harmonies. (Think of Wagner and other great composers!) Venturi, by the way, in the passage declaring that black is not a beautiful color, drags the example of an ape into the discussion. Well, the ape has its place in Nature, and is enhanced and beautified by the fitness of its surroundings. To the ape we human beings no doubt appear to be strange dissonant creatures. Each created being has its harmonious place in the universe.

The laboratory is precise but very limited. Writers like Venturi are broad and dogmatic—and very speculative. Let us turn then to the larger generalizations of the psychologists. The two new schools in our time that have attracted most attention have been the Gestalt school and the Freudian school. The Freudians hold that sexual desires are often repressed and that all distorted dreams symbolize sexual repressions. You must understand, of course, that the term, "sex," is given by the Freudians a very wide significance; it is used in the broad sense of affection. The Gestalt theory can be summed up in one sentence: Gestalt psychology emphasizes the indivisible unity of each response of an organism. Gestalt psychologists broke with the scientific method of the past of working from parts to the whole, of breaking units down to finer and finer components. They insisted that a whole was more than the sum of its parts, that a whole had qualities peculiar to itself which can never be accounted for by merely adding up the parts. It is a theory which an artist should find quite congenial.

The value of consulting the psychologists is that they always lead one to refer to one's own experience and to try to discover just what one has learned from living. To be

autobiographical for a moment, when I was a child I read the story of Socrates drinking the cup of hemlock. It profoundly saddened me. My teacher did not give me any explanation of why Socrates was forced to take the hemlock; I knew nothing of the background, the philosophy and mythology, that surrounded the act. It could have been for me the story of anyone, not the story of the great philosopher Socrates.

Recalling this experience, I wonder about our educational methods, as I am sure many people are doing when they look at the barbarity and bloodshed of the Second World War which rages as I write. Should young children be bothered with school books, as I was by the book containing the tale of Socrates? I sometimes feel like advocating that children should first of all be given exercises for the mind by playing games like chess or checkers. The good that physical exercise, in the form of games like baseball, football and basketball, accomplished for the bodies of children could be duplicated for the minds of children by the enjoyment of chess and other mental games. In this way the child would acquire the mental agility and resourcefulness to attack with benefit the problems of book learning.

The War leads me to this further thought. If people would only develop their imaginations by the frequent listening to good music and the intimate acquaintance with the great artists of all the ages whose works are hung in the museums, there could be a common understanding created among all the civilized peoples. This understanding would, I think, exceed the understanding derived from the ethics taught in school. At any rate, the great religions and the great ethical teachings, much as we owe to them, have *not* prevented the catastrophe of a global war in our time. Surely a greater cultivation of music and art appreciation or love would do something to mitigate the animal nature of man.

Apropos of my advocacy of both mental and physical

games for the young, I think that my contention is reinforced by Plato. Kant emphasized the advantage for mental health of the objective instead of the subjective attitude of mind, but Plato is more to the point. Everything does depend on the physique of a man. In the *Republic*, Plato beautifully makes it clear that if the body deteriorates, the mind is affected more or less. The mind, of course, is the controlling factor that dictates bodily functions and it also invokes the power of will. Nevertheless, if the body is neglected or abused, the mind suffers as well.

Apropos of the subtlety of our psychological responses, I might relate here an anecdote about two of my nieces from the West who paid me a visit a few years ago. One evening I related to them some incident of my life. I noticed that as they listened, they focused their gaze on an old blue Persian vase filled with pink roses that rested on the table opposite them. A year later they paid me another visit, and the blue vase was again filled with pink roses. The girls looked at it and simultaneously exclaimed: "Remember the story you told us last year?" They were very surprised that each had had the same thought at the same time. I explained the mystery to them. I told them that I had noticed their gaze upon the vase when I had told them the story a year ago, and that subconsciously they had gathered in their memory the vase while they consciously remembered the story.

Among the writers whom I have found stimulating on the psychology of art have been Robert Morris Ogden, whose book, *The Psychology of Art*, may be familiar to some of my readers, and B. J. Weld, the author of *Introduction to Psychology*. One of the good things Ogden says is that "a sunset is not criticized; it is felt and enjoyed," and he adds that "the word 'criticism' used on such an occasion would emphasize too much the element of deliberate judgment and of comparison of standards."

Weld makes a good observation about the psychology of distance. We can see immense distances, of course, but



look at a starry sky some night—can we discriminate among these immense distances? Don't we see the moon, the planets and the stars at about the same distance from us, although we know that millions of miles separate them from each other?

One picks up an interesting observation like the above, but the enigma of reality remains as sphinx-like as ever. Reality, Aristotle decided, is not reason. This led him to the question, "What is being?" which brought him to attempt to discover a psychological conception of sensation and the feeling we get from things.

We possess five senses and I think we have a potential sixth sense that is quite unfamiliar to us. When one sense is active, the others seem to drop out of our consciousness. Yet the mind or imagination is constantly reacting to sight, hearing, taste, touch or smell. When our consciousness ceases, the cosmic relations we have been aware of stop with us. Without consciousness, color could not have been seen (and enjoyed), sound could not have been heard, heat and cold could not have been felt. Without the sense of smell the fragrance of a flower is non-existent to us. What a wealth of knowledge our five senses bring! Without sensory knowledge our minds could not possibly have developed upon the heritage of knowledge acquired by earlier centuries. Thanks to our senses, we have receptive minds, and fortunately we also have retentive minds, minds that remember things. Even the amoeba senses what other creatures possess. It has a way of subsisting on certain food that it comes in contact with, and it will not touch anything else but food needed for subsistence.

I remarked at the outset that it was as an artist that I was making a tour of the psychologists. Now what psychological experience is it that the artist is most keenly interested in? The esthetic experience, of course. It is just this experience that psychology is baffled by. One psychologist, for example, speaks of attending an orchestral concert. He

strips this experience of intellectual significance. He doesn't find moral import in it. He denies economic utility to it. He isolates it from life—and he is dead wrong in so doing.

I must take issue with this psychologist who has written a learned book on perception and esthetic value. Surely it is evident that if one goes to a concert, he receives not only intense pleasure from the music but also through his intellect he enlarges the scope of his imagination while listening to the music. It can be proved that music is a therapeutic agency to drive away mental depression. The mind certainly comes alive to the study and analysis of music. You cannot even say that a concert is economic waste for you. In my own career, the translation of music into color has amply repaid me financially. There is an economic side to composing, and great musicians have been well compensated materially, and have spent their financial profits in the community, thereby contributing to the economic life around them.

Is the moral import of music in doubt, as this psychologist has said? On the contrary, fine music is a medium of religious expression and softens the hearts of even hardened criminals. From cradle to grave music is a great factor in refining men and women. Music, the highest of the arts, is one of mankind's greatest assets. Music, let me say, is even highly scientific, a point to insist upon when in the company of psychologists.

If, however, we do not get from psychology as yet a satisfactory account of the esthetic experience, we do learn things of value from them about empathy. They tell us why we like to see a kite flying, for instance. If we fly the kite ourselves, our love of mastery is gratified. But it happens that we like to watch a kite flown by someone else, we like to watch the flight of a hawk or a rocket or a balloon or airplane; we love to watch things that float or balance themselves or in other ways seem superior to the force of gravity. Why? Because of empathy, the "feeling oneself into" the object. Sympathy means "feeling with," empathy

means "feeling into." In the latter case, the observer identifies himself with the object and gets a pleasant satisfying feeling from this identification. Empathy is therefore an important subject to the lover of esthetics.

One other thing the psychologists do: they lead us straight to the fascinating subject of illusion. At one extreme, they are, as I have noted, using delicate instruments in the laboratory, teaching us, for example, highly interesting facts about the selectivity of the ear and the eye. Our ears will respond to air vibrations in a range from twenty to twenty thousand per second. But outside these limits there are plenty of physical sounds we do not hear. The eye is sensitive to a frequency range from 400 to 770 trillion per second. Other frequencies, like heat waves, X-rays, Hertz waves, do not stimulate the eye. Illusion also is tested in the laboratory. Even Aristotle who lived three centuries before Christ performed a simple laboratory experiment in illusion. He crossed two fingers and touched a marble with the crossed part of both fingers. He had the illusion of feeling two marbles. The reader is invited to try Aristotle's experiment by using a pencil in place of the marble.

And here, in conclusion, are some thoughts from Dr. Wheeler, an exponent of the important Gestalt theory of psychology, which I consider are well worth while. "The future," says Dr. Wheeler, "controls the present. . . . When the branch of the tree breaks and the apple falls, it determines the apple's future and past time. . . . Spatially and temporally, the center of the earth is ahead of the apple; it is the apple's future. The whole, of which the apple is part, surrounds the apple, both in space and time. Determinism holds to its parts; the whole is both spatial and temporal; it contains future as much as the past, controls the present."

That I consider very well said and I like the following very much: "Mind is the brain—in action. It is organized energy that thinks."

And here Professor Wheeler puts Gestalt psychology into a nutshell: "All phenomena must be described in terms of 'the organic whole, recognized not as a problem but as a solution' . . . . In Gestalt psychology a whole possesses a unity which is more than the mere sum of its parts."



Part IV

A SECOND ATTACK



## Chapter XII

### CONTRA WILENSKI

*Nature is made better by no mean!  
But nature makes that mean! so over that art  
Which you say, adds to nature, is an art  
That nature makes . . . This is an art  
Which does not mend nature, change it rather, but  
The art itself is nature.*

—Perdita in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

OF ALL THE CHAMPIONS of "modern" art, Wilenski, the English writer, is the most provocative, and his *Modern Movement in Art* is, in fact, the handbook of our "modern" art critics. He has the kind of wrongness on so many points that it is really stimulating. We owe some people a debt for being wrong in such a challenging way that we are forced to think straight and survey all the well-reasoned grounds for our opposition to them. So it is with Wilenski. A refutation of him is not a sterile exercise, a mere sweeping away of rubbish, but a discovery or a rediscovery of what is sound and tested by time in the world of art.

"Time will tell" is sometimes a lazy man's phrase. I do not use it lazily, however. I use it in meeting the challenge of Wilenski, which means I use it for purposes of defense and counter-attack where defeat will be my portion if I do not make a telling use of the phrase. So let me say at once that the expression, "time will tell," does not refer to a generation or so. That is only the test of a fashion. I refer to the procession of the centuries; I say that not decades but centuries are the judge of great accomplishment in art. Who stands the test of time? Only the giants like Michelangelo and Raphael and Leonardo. If you ask, for



example, were Greek art and civilization in their heyday superior to our present art and civilization, you are applying the test of time. You have escaped from a sort of temporal provincialism and are making comparison across a great stretch of history.

Now it is a trait of Wilenski that he wishes to undo what time has shown was accomplished by the greatest masters. He is led to attempt this by his architectural misconception, to which I shall come shortly. Sweepingly, Wilenski condemns the Romantic school of painters, they who stirred the imagination of later artists and spectators, and in so doing he underrates the greatest factor in art, which is the imagination. Art that evokes imagination is a great asset to the artist today, waking as it does his dormant powers. But Wilenski discards the highly imaginative Romantic artists.

Wilenski knows that his foe is time, and he also knows that universality is his enemy. Therefore he roundly declares that "there is no such thing as a universal language of art." But it is sufficient to remind ourselves that men know that music is a universal language, and that being so, why cannot the classical arts also be universal? Not only should art not be of a temporary character but should appeal to the world of the future; art should most certainly also be international and universal. The true artist should thrill to the words of Thomas Paine: "The world is my country. To do good is my religion."

Indeed, we may ask, is there such a thing as American art or the art of any nationality? Of course, one may portray the life of people called Americans, as an illustrator does, but real art overrides geographical boundaries. The truth of this is readily established in literature. Shakespeare was an Englishman, yet his plays belong to the whole world. It matters not where the scenes of his plays are laid. His psychological thought is of so universal a nature that it does not matter in what language his Portia or his Hamlet may

speak; the thought comes through with all its universality in Danish, Italian, French, German, Russian or any other civilized tongue. That is a truth that needed to be recalled a few years ago in the controversy over the Mexican painter Rivera's inclusion of Lenin in his Radio City mural. Make no mistake about it: the isms of one moment may change into the isms of another moment, but the emotion we call brotherhood of man or love of mankind is permanent and eternal. If artists living in the United States paint American subjects, well and good. But that does not mean that what they paint is American art. They paint the American scene, but insofar as they achieve great art, their art is international. If they incorporate in their representation a spirit of universal understanding which people in any part of the civilized world can capture and appreciate, then it is not the expression of American subject matter—they are giving but the expression of an American artist endowed with genius who is benefitting all mankind. Take the so-called modern art of France of recent years. Can you compare it with the Rococo period or the Empire period, and still call it typical French art?

As a matter of fact, the only true "American art" is Indian. Before the white man came to America, this art was isolated and belonged only to the Indians. After all, considering how our country has assimilated and fused the arts of so many nations, is there such a thing as a typical American school of art? Many of us mention Stuart with patriotic fervor as an exponent of typical American art; we do not pause to think that his training was English. It was likewise with West and Copley, and a century later with Sargent and Whistler.

The spirit of the Italian landscape infuses the canvases of Richard Wilson and Turner. Are their paintings typically English? Zuccarelli, the Eighteenth Century landscapist, though an Italian, lived in England, was a member of

the Royal Academy, and was greatly imitated by some of his English contemporaries.

Again, when we look at a landscape by Gainsborough, do we regard it simply as a representation of an English countryside, or do we think of it as a great creation with a touch of the universality of an artist? We do not think of it as English any more than we would regard the work of a great French painter who visited our shores and painted the Hudson River or a New England rural scene as American.

Today we have the spectacle of American artists, some of them of foreign birth, exhibiting their art on Fifty-Seventh Street, New York, and when we look at their art, we see that they acquired it in France under the influence of certain painters who were themselves of Spanish or Italian extraction.

For a further illustration: consider that Rimsky-Korsakoff and Moszkowski, who were Russians, and Bizet and Ravel, who were Frenchmen, all wrote typical Spanish music. A German, Felix Mendelssohn, even wrote a Scotch Symphony! Is Dvorák's *Symphony of the New World*, although it is interspersed with American folk melodies, American or Bohemian? Is the Second Symphony of Sibelius typically Finnish?

The Ballet Russe, if analyzed, turns out to be Italian, French, English and German, and half a dozen other nationalities contribute to it! Indeed, many of our American folk dances are executed to the tunes of England, France, Germany and—Africa! And our own *Star-Spangled Banner*, the most revered of tunes, is naught else, according to some, than an old English melody.

Yet it must be conceded that isolation and lack of communication with the outer world has made some art thoroughly typical of its environment. China, a nation that has produced some of the world's greatest art, is a conspicuous example. For thousands of years this venerable country

was isolated from European culture. Its creations were inspirations from its own territory. But please note that where the borders of China at some period touched other countries, India, for instance, or where the Chinese came in contact with the Persians through trade routes, the arts adopted some characteristics of their neighbors. This was true also of religious philosophies.

With the shortening of communications, the future world will become even more united. Great art like science, music or poetry knows no boundaries. Science has proved that there is no such thing as a pure race. All races have at some time in the history of the world been shuffled and re-shuffled—even that pure Aryan race of Herr Hitler's fantasy. Thus art, stemming from all the civilizations of the world, is inter-related and is universal in its spirit.

The great truth is that art is interested in ideals that are not material and nationalist things but are mental and universal. How well Ruskin stated the normal relationship to art when he declared: "I live in two worlds—the physical and the spiritual."

Thus we see that Wilenski is provincial on two counts: in space because he denies universality to art, and in time because he dismisses so much of the past. He is like a person who turns over an old photograph album and laughs at the quaint poses and dress of thirty or forty years ago without the least suspicion that our descendants, looking at photographs of us, may find our fashions in clothes ludicrous. Yes, the mushy sentimentality of some of the genre paintings and some of the novels of the Victorian period strike us now as childish. But to the contemporaries of these things they were serious; they took them as seriously as Wilenski and his followers take certain works today which will be laughed at by time. We have to go back and try to enter into the state of mind of the Victorian before we can understand how he judged his contemporary artists. The future, rest as-

sured, will try to understand Wilenski's state of mind in order to explain his judgments.

We now come to Wilenski's central idea, which, as everyone familiar with the literature of art in our time knows, is "architectural form." Wilenski maintains that the idea of architecture is typical art. The architect, he points out, is simultaneously a builder and an artist. As builder, working in stone, steel or other materials, he is concerned with the functional aspect of his work; he is carrying out a practical purpose. This is the scientific function of the architect. But he has another function too. According to Wilenski, he must gain other than practical results, he must gain results that come from "the idea which lies behind all the so-called classical art of the last five centuries. It is the idea of art which was served, for example, by an artist like Raphael in the 'School of Athens' and by Claude and Poussin in many other works." Why, by the way, should Wilenski cite just those three painters, Claude, Poussin and Raphael in the School of Athens? Did not all the great painters have creative form? Does he find in this trio the nearest approach to modernism?

Waving aside these questions, let us have a go directly at this matter of architectural form, which has found many modern art critics to worship it. What Wilenski's argument boils down to is the wish that art should be "different." He puts the stress on being "different." Unfortunately for his thesis, when great artists paint a picture, they are intent on creating great results. They forget about being "different" and aim to be original, to do better, to surpass their predecessors. Wilenski does not preach about painting better but only about being "different." We can apply these remarks to other fields, furniture, for instance. Certainly we wait eagerly for other creators of the rank of Chippendale and Sheraton, or their contemporary French *ébénistes*, but thus far no others have arrived to take their places. One cannot, *à la* Wilenski, force the birth of an esthetic achievement

merely by hammering away at doing something merely different; one must be imbued with spirit, spontaneity and imagination; one must drink from the Pierian springs of the soul.

Next, in regard to architectural form, I must comment on the fact that many art writers today appear to value or emphasize form more than color. At the least, one is as important as the other. I myself would place color above form, and rank it next to music. Here we encroach on the subject of human vision. Wilenski says that he does not trust mechanical vision, *i.e.*, natural human vision, yet he does trust it in order to see Cézanne's architectural paintings. He and other art writers say they do not like descriptive art, yet they themselves employ it.

The "mechanical eye"—why call it so? After all the eye is one of our sense organs. Without it there could not be such a thing as a work of art. Strangely enough, this "mechanical eye" is the same eye that Wilenski uses on works of art that comply with his own point of view. I believe I can quickly show that Wilenski has over-simplified this business of the "mechanical eye." It is noteworthy, I think, that Freud omitted the *color* of the human eye as a factor in hypnotic effects on the opposite sex and as an inducer of the sexual impulse. Tentatively, I advance the proposition that the brown eye of a woman or the black eye of a woman will thrill more to the blue or gray eye of a man, or vice versa, and that these men and women will find themselves sexually sympathetic. But I speculate on whether there may not be an opposite reaction when a blue eye focuses on a brown eye of a person belonging to the same sex. Then there may be a subconscious lack of sympathy or drawing away. I have asked a number of children about their reaction to the color of eyes not their own color, and usually the children answered that they preferred their own color. Let me add, as an hypothesis of course, that such reactions may subconsciously sway judge and jury in courtroom cases.

Now then, the question arises: Have we sufficient proof that black, brown, blue and gray eyes see colors in the same way? Each may call the color seen the same name, but do they respond the same? I hope that the psychologists will give us an answer some day; I bring up the speculation now simply to show this "mechanical eye" which is the natural human vision is the eye of perception, of sexual attraction, of illusion, hypnotism, emotion, and so on, as well as the eye of esthetic appreciation.

However fanciful my speculation may seem, please remember that in looking at a work of art we absorb the concreteness of it. In science we deal with the abstract. Consequently a writer should beware of easy generalizations about the "mechanical eye." To get down to the concrete, Wilenski states that Renoir's first contribution was the rainbow palette, his second was broken color. But at the same time he says that Renoir had been preceded in these "innovations" by Velasquez, Watteau, Gainsborough and Goya. Why does he then credit Renoir and Monet as creators of a new idea? In his zeal Wilenski frequently contradicts himself. What Wilenski probably means is that these forerunners of Monet and Renoir now and then indulged themselves impressionistically, without emphasizing impressionism as an innovation. Their interest in this direction was the effect in composition, whereas the nineteenth century impressionists, taking up where their predecessors left off, strengthened this theory by the introduction of the broken color theory, calling it a new medium of color expression. It was more of a "scientific" formula, a piece of new material, so to speak, to be handed over to others for the conceiving of other creations. To Velasquez and his followers "impressionism" was a means to an end. To the Nineteenth Century painters, it was an experiment *in toto*.

One of the important questions that keep arising in reading Wilenski is this: Has the machine age impeded the creative artist? For the moment, let me say that insofar as

the skill of man's hands has been subordinated to the machine, the creative arts have been impeded. But in a sense the machine itself can be considered a work of inventive art intended to mitigate and lessen mankind's toil, so as to confer more leisure on people, thus permitting more people to pursue art. It may well be found in the future through some such plan as the Beveridge Plan or other social panaceas that the machine is a blessing in its shortening of hours of toil, thereby giving release to creative energies in the increased leisure.

I have digressed for a moment from the "mechanical eye" that Wilenski talks about. Returning to it, I should like to quote Thomas Jewell Craven. "Good painting," he declares, "is not mechanical records of things seen; it is a coherent statement of what conditioned human beings know about things." That is finely said, and is good sense.

And now for some thoughts on Classicism and Romanticism, since Wilenski touches often on these two terms. First of all, fix in mind that Romanticism and Classicism are two great states of mind, or tempers. Romanticism has a special impact on the emotions of the artist. It is highly emotive.

According to Wilenski, the Romantic artist sets out to perceive "unusually emotive fragments." Then Wilenski uses a tell-tale word, a highly prejudicial word; he says the Romantic runs the danger of "degenerating"—but I think that what Wilenski calls a "degeneration" according to his taste, others might call an improvement. Be that as it may, Wilenski charges that to the artists of the modern movement the Romantic credo even before "degeneration" is a heresy. "The fragments chosen by the Romantics were chosen not for their formal or generic but for their emotive significance; they were the fragments which had affected the artist's emotions." Wilenski also explains that modern works of art seem abnormal to many people because they are unlike the art with which they are familiar. Well, it all depends on



what you mean by modern art. If you mean Anthro-Po-Eccentric art, then the Anthro-Po-Concentric public certainly considers it abnormal. But the average spectator today does not consider Concentric modern art abnormal; on the contrary, he encourages genuinely progressive ideas. Eccentric art often interferes with the development of appreciation for contemporary Concentric art.

What shall we say about Wilenski's unqualified onslaught on Romantic art? Simply this: Romanticism in utilizing the emotive powers of the artist and displaying them to the world is as vital as architectural form. It has as much right to exist as has any other ism. In truth, it is more powerful than many other isms because it springs from the imagination. It should not disturb us if the artist of the "modern" movement calls Romanticism a heresy, for the entire "modern" movement is of very questionable standing. If Romanticism is a departure from the Classical, it is simply a change of ideas, and at some future time there will be another vogue for it. Time will be the criterion. As for these "modernists," if they deliberately omit any feature which their predecessors employed, they are not following out a logical conception but being consciously "different." Personally I believe that the Almighty Architect of the World smiles at such nonsense as Wilenski perpetrates. Anyway, I question if Raphael when he painted the "School of Athens" and Claude and Poussin ever thought of architectural form in their art. Vasari, for instance, does not mention any such interest on the part of Raphael and his predecessors, nor does any other historian. On second thought, doesn't the "mechanical vision" turn out to be simply the natural vision, the medium that enables the imagination to perceive and react?

Wilenski generally sticks to the trio of Raphael, Claude and Poussin, but in one passage he brought in Delacroix and Rubens to support his theory. Delacroix was presented as "advancing" as he matured from Romantic to architectural

art, and Rubens was shown as combining the descriptive and architectural points of view. They did this through sheer genius. The contention cannot be accepted. Delacroix was a Romantic, pure and simple. I am positive he never thought of making deliberate attempts at "architecture" but painted as he pleased—spontaneously and in the only way he knew. I am equally positive that Rubens never thought of the descriptive and the architectural as separate categories but looked on his painting as a complete unit of expression.

Now let us examine Wilenski's charge of "degeneration of technique" levelled against Romantic artists. These Romantics, Wilenski alleges, used exaggerated light effects to stress their emotive fragments, and frequently went into distortions so much that their works became caricatures. Wilenski does not appreciate what great art went into the light effects of the Romantic artists, and indeed some of the "modernists" have little conception of the use of light effects. The caricatures Wilenski speaks of in the late Nineteenth Century and early Twentieth Century art were the expressions of some of the emotive artists of that period and were absorbed by commercial interests. Have we not today such examples in advertising? We see this frequently in our subway poster-cards and in our magazines; it may be a pure photographic, cubistic or surrealist arrangement. In most instances it was of no great value as art during the Spanish-American or Boer War, as it is of no great value in the days of the global war which rages as I write.

Wilenski is wrong too about distortion in early Christian religious art; these distortions were not deliberate but sprang from the limited knowledge of the art of painting possessed by these early artists. How mistaken Wilenski is! The distortions of the primitive Italian painters were the results of their limited knowledge of draftsmanship owing to the intermittent discouragement and suppression of art before the medieval period.

How gratified they would have been to have been able to

paint in the fruitful style of the Renaissance period! But they were children—highly talented ones—perhaps surpassing some of the Renaissance painters in their imaginative capacities—and their distortions were nothing but the results of their endeavors to improve, although handicapped by a limited knowledge of drawing, upon their Byzantine predecessors. The great artists of religious painting did not resort to distortion during the Renaissance and later periods as a means of enhancing the figure of Christ. Rubens, for example, enhanced his Christ by means of a lighting effect so that He would stand out above the surrounding figures in his *Descent from the Cross*. Yes, it is the very lighting effect that Wilenski objects to. Other artists likewise used the same medium to emphasize the spirituality of Christ. One can mention Correggio in his *Nativity*, Raphael in his *Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor*, and there are others. This enhancement was not achieved by distortion, because these artists were mature draftsmen. Wilenski says that El Greco “distorted his figures in a passionate desire to make them appear more saintly and divine.” As explained in another essay, El Greco used his distortions as a means of defense. He deliberately changed his style so as to avoid the criticism of being called an imitator of Titian or Tintoretto. Even if he had no such purpose for his distortions (and his distorted style is worshiped by his admirers), still he does not supersede in greatness the non-distortion painters of the Venetian and Flemish schools. At least El Greco had an original style. His imitators of today—that is, some of our “modernists”—distort these distortions either because they have no other creative ability or because of defective draftsmanship.

At this point one should mention Wilenski's contention that when a man says a certain picture gives him a thrill, he is telling us something about himself rather than about the picture. Here I agree with Wilenski. It would be more logical for viewers of paintings to say, “I am attracted to

that picture," or "I admire its craft." But most the time one hears the following exclamation: "I cannot explain my liking but I feel it." If a preference cannot be explained by a viewer, it is either a form of pseudo-criticism or else a purely illogical state.

After drinking so much from the turgid source of Wilenski, let me introduce here a thought as clear as spring water from Dr. Max J. Friedlander on style and manner. "Style," this writer says, "means form. It implies appreciation. Style is a river, manner a canal. The Thirteenth Century built in the Gothic style, the Nineteenth in the Gothic manner—that is the way we express it today. In the vernacular we praise a man for having style, meaning that his qualities, his looks, his clothes, manifest a harmonious character which creates an esthetically pleasing impression. The harmony, the necessary sequence of the several manifestations or parts rest upon the fact that an unhampered force flows from the center of the personality through the entire body, directing and dominating it. One can acquire good manners. One either has style or one hasn't."

Refreshed by this draught of common sense, let us return to Wilenski, this time to his thought on naturalism and representation. Wilenski holds that all representational techniques are deliberately symbolic in character as opposed to what he calls the naturalistic trick. Here again he drags in Raphael of the "School of Athens," Claude and Poussin, and adds the Cubists for good measure.

Wilenski never gets very far away from his architectural form hobby. He claims Vermeer of Delft as an artist of the same architectural character as Poussin or a modern cubist. One of his key statements is that "the original architectural artist's picture will be an architectural arrangement symbolizing some actual or imagined perception of the formal relations of the cottage, the tree and the lane to one another." This is the reply I would make to Wilenski: Why not perceive and picture some ideal symbols springing from the

imagination instead of a cottage or a tree trunk? These symbols would be of greater interest than the objects of that "mechanical vision" to which you so strenuously object. Why not go in for Romantic expression which can be imaginatively interpreted and can even receive an interpretation that stresses "architectural" perception?

That word, "perception," reminds me that Wilenski makes a fetish of it. He maintains that it is nonsense to say that an artist "paints what he sees" and argues that we should say that an artist paints what he perceives. But why is it nonsense to say that an artist paints what he sees? To a person of catholic taste and concentric judgment, an artist is entitled to paint with the freedom of naturalistic technique just as much as with the freedom of impressionistic technique. What is there degrading about the "mechanical vision"? Is this vision mechanical or is it simply natural? Certainly, the artist should paint what he sees in order to perceive and to use his imagination to idealize his work of art.

In passing, Wilenski unburdens himself of some thoughts about the influence of the camera. He stresses the camera's limitations but winds up in an obvious contradiction when he says that "many 'artistic' photographers imitate the pictures of Corot's middle period" and then says that Corot imitated photographs. We can readily concede that the camera has limitations, but certainly a great artist like Corot did not have to imitate photographs. However, as Wilenski says, photographers imitated Corot.

That precious silvery tone of Corot, which photographers have tried so hard to capture, is the very quality that has given this artist his distinction. What matters it if Corot did paint hundreds of these silvery toned landscapes? Each is as fine and great in itself as a rare flower in a field of thousands. (See figure 14.) Of course, Corot's output of these paintings has been grossly exaggerated; there have been many spurious ones produced by imitators. The paintings

of his leading imitator, Trouillebert, with the simple signature of Corot fraudulently affixed by unscrupulous dealers, were even purchased by art collectors.

Some art dealers are maligning the true reputation of Corot by putting the emphasis upon his portraits. Corot did paint a number of figure pieces, which were mediocre, and had he to depend on these, he would never have received any recognition as a painter of great merit. The art dealers who have cornered the market for these figure pieces have an easy time selling them through the leverage of Corot's reputation as a landscape painter. In fact, their selling point is "rarity," and some of our art critics are already beginning to see the Picasso in these portraits. Does that mean that Picasso was an imitator of Corot? There must be something definitely faulty in the logic of our critics, including, of course, Mr. Wilenski.

Indeed, there is something dictatorial about Wilenski. Have you not noticed how many times the word "must" occurs in his writing? This is quite odd when he talks about freedom of expression for the artist equal to the freedom of the architect, and throws in quite a few "musts" for other people in his discussion. After all, why stress architectural form? As far back as the Renaissance, painters and connoisseurs understood all about it. Every great artist is an architect when he builds his masterpiece. When Wilenski insists that the artist must be free, that is certainly not news. Why not say "creative form" instead of "architectural form," merely to suit Wilenski's whim? Wilenski's utterances have more than a dogmatic cast; they smack of a dictatorial temperament.

At one time Wilenski tried to break a lance with Ruskin on the subject of the technique of the Pre-Raphaelite painters. Ruskin has summed up the object of these painters as being "to paint Nature as it is around them with the help of modern science." Wilenski sneers at this. He says that it means only Nature as seen by mechanical human vision,

and that the modern science refers only to the daguerreotype. It can certainly be doubted if Wilenski grasped the true meaning of Ruskin. When Ruskin raises Turner to the highest pinnacle, it is not because Turner was bound by his mechanical vision alone. Of course, the Pre-Raphaelites used their natural vision in the sense in which I used the term a little while ago, and Turner by the employment of his natural vision also managed to use his imagination almost to the point of giving an abstract form to his idealism. Nor is the point that Wilenski makes that the Pre-Raphaelites had not been to Italy or seen a painting of an Italian artist before the time of Raphael a valid point; granting that they never saw an original Italian primitive painting, which I question, it still makes them the more imaginative painters even by abstracting their creations from engravings or other sources. They achieved their results not by looking at masters before Raphael but by the strength of their own perceptions and imaginations.

About Nineteenth Century paintings Wilenski makes the following wild claim: "The pictures . . . are now gray and colorless partly because 'direct' painting loses in course of time whatever brilliance it may have had and partly because pictures painted by the tone values are not painted in colors but in tinted grays."

I wish to make a somewhat technical observation on the foregoing. Corot's deliberate characteristic was to bring out the effects of lights in grays or in silvery tones, and these are colors even in grays. By the way, Corot perceived his "grays" just before the sky became bright with sunlight. This is a fact painters love to know, and worth more than a dozen theoretical statements about a master. The color white by itself is nothing but a combination of all the colors of the spectrum. Rotate these colors on a screen and the eye will see white. It is the solar light. As for the color gray, it is nothing but a mixture of black and white. Take a square box painted white and place it at a certain angle. One

side will appear white—the side that is facing you; but the side in the shadow will appear gray. In itself gray is the color white.

So much for Wilenski's opinion of Corot. He is equally mistaken in his opinions of Van Gogh and Gauguin because of their Romantic inclinations. I do not agree so far as the Romantic factor is concerned, but I do agree that these artists through some dealers' high pressure propaganda influenced critics, artists and public, and thus impeded the path to progress. Wilenski feels that Van Gogh and Gauguin confused the issue and impeded art progress. We can just as well argue that Cézanne and other touted artists of the latter Nineteenth Century impeded progress of other artists, putting them into oblivion for a while by the publicity which they attracted. Why must we renounce the Romantics? Why must modern painters approach their problems like architects? Always with Wilenski we are told what we *must do*, and to his "musts" we fling back the answer: Time, my friend, will judge all of us.

Wilenski is most brash when he sets his personal judgment against that of three centuries of connoisseurs and declares that Jordaens, the pupil, was superior to Rubens, the master. None of Rubens' pupils, not Van Dyck, nor Snyders, and certainly not Jordaens, great as they were, can measure up to the master; but Wilenski, who bestows laurels upon Cézanne, an artist known for only a few decades, would snatch the laurel from Rubens venerated for three hundred years and perversely award Jordaens a higher honor than his due!

Finally, Wilenski chatters at times about the "artist-spectator." He means that "every original artist as spectator has to discover (a) whether the initial impulse of his work was, in fact, an enlargement of his architectual, romantic or descriptive experience; (b) whether the work is, in fact, a perfect concrete symbol of that enlargement." If he decides that it is the latter, "it is," says Wilenski, "his obvi-



ous duty to call it 'right' and to add nothing to it." To this I reply, the work should be symbolic of the artist's ideology but his imagination should strengthen it, and this can come about only by improving the artist's initial impulse.

My chief point in this summary is that critics who dissent from objective matter should go all the way and criticize the artist who is pinned down to his model or to Nature and raise the question, why not paint directly from the imagination and use one's own medium of expression? After all, without observing Nature in the first place, we cannot abstract our creations but we may enhance them by means of imagination. Wilenski should also remember that there are some erudite persons in such fields as philosophy, metaphysics, science, and so on who are not qualified in the arts. They write persuasively but their writing does not, all the same, bring out what art is.

My concluding point is that the trouble with some of our "modern" artists is that they have never acquired the rudiments of art, have never mastered that technique which Wilenski wishes to discard. It is as necessary to the painter as it is to the musician to acquire first of all his technique, the mechanics of his art, no matter what his gifts may be. This is his foundation, or, if you will, his stepping-stone to great achievements. Afterwards he can make innovations, as Wagner and Brahms did on the basis of a thorough knowledge of musical technique. Even Cézanne copied pictures in the Louvre once upon a time, and his champions say he did not copy badly. Yet Wilenski impatiently wants to discard technique. Of course, to technique must be added some individuality of expression. A talented child may have more ability in expressing his musical feelings, though handicapped by imperfect technique, than has a perfect technician who is devoid of talent. But even so, even to the genius with great individuality, technical knowledge is indispensable for his future master works. This seems a simple point to make,

but it is the point that Wilenski failed to grasp at the outset in his eccentric effusions on art.

As I put down my pen on finishing this essay, I am tempted to ask myself why have I taken Mr. Wilenski so seriously, since it must be quite evident to my reader that he is by heritage or training an Anthropeo-Eccentric in art. When, for example, he considers that distortions in a painting which are equivalent to the immature expression of a child or a savage to be "architectural form" (a type of lofty creation), or when he elevates some immature painters to the status of our established old masters, then all we can say is that he is biologically constituted to make such judgments. It is a waste of time or energy to reason with him. He would never see my point of view even though he studied my words, and so we part, agreeing to disagree.

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## Chapter XIII

### . . . AND CONTRA BLOOMSBURY

THEY HAVE BEEN dying off in recent years but at one time a group of writers, painters and art critics residing in the Bloomsbury section of London exerted a considerable influence. I do not speak here of the merits of the literary figures and others in the Bloomsbury circle. I am only concerned with its two art critics, Clive Bell and the late Roger Fry, who were the Bloomsbury arbiters of taste in painting.

Clive Bell, as everyone who has read him knows, is much given to sweeping statements which he hopes will be startling. For example: "I cannot believe that more than one in a hundred of the works produced between 1450 and 1850 can be properly described as a work of art." To this easy way with statistics about a long stretch of time, I can only reply with the highly useful word: "Bunk!" Such sweeping dismissals as Bell indulges in do not get us anywhere. He is always tracing long slopes of greatness and decline, but his topography is greatly at variance with the accepted judgments of connoisseurs, as recorded in encyclopedias and other works where Anthro-po-Eccentric taste is not wanted. This is an example of Bell's personal *kultur*; to suit himself he would upset what has been long established by time.

A typical Bell outburst is when he tells us that Cézanne and Gauguin "by simplicity and sincerity led back the world to the haunts of Truth and Nature." Granting for the sake of argument that they did (but did they?), are they the only ones who have done so? The contention that Cézanne is leading the world back to truth is rather paradoxical. The naked truth is that the hypnotic M. Vollard spoke more eloquently than did Cézanne. What Cézanne

did do—because he was so rudimentary—was to encourage hordes of imitators. He was good material for the inexperienced, but an impediment to the progress of art. As for Gauguin's leading the world back to Nature, does Bell infer by this that Gauguin lived close to Nature on a South Sea island amongst a primitive people? All I shall say is that Gauguin's predecessor Millet was ahead of him in this respect. He needed no South Sea inspiration, but received his inspirations from his back door in the Barbizon country. I shall leave it to the judgment of time as to which painter, Gauguin or Millet, has led the world back to Nature.

But before going further with Bell's opinions about individual painters, let us set down a fair statement of his theory of art. He says that representation in art is not bad in itself, nor is it good. It is simply irrelevant. To appreciate art we need only a sense of form and color and a knowledge of tri-dimensional space. Significant form is painting that conveys a certain feeling the artist had, which might be called "a passionate apprehension of form." The artist wishes to express this passionate apprehension of pure forms in certain relations. That is, I think, a fair summary of Bell's views.

Clive Bell's position has always seemed to me far-fetched and precious. Of what value are these finespun distinctions about the irrelevance of representative form? Representative form was certainly good enough for the greatest masters of the past, and the viewer of their works was inspired by it. If a work of art is reduced to the Bell prescription of form and color and a knowledge of tri-dimensional space, there is omitted the essence, the spirit, the imaginative quality that a great painting should possess.

A special problem for Bell is posed by the fact that art changes from age to age. Why should this occur if "significant form" is the be-all of art? Bell answers by saying that superficially art will always be changing while essentially it

cannot change. He attributes the superficial changes to what he calls the ape instinct of man.

I think that the more profound answer is that art is like everything else an evolutionary process. Everything changes. Often we find that what was scientific last year is unscientific this year. Even the physical make-up of man has changed through evolution. According to Darwin, evolution has changed the ape. But evolutionary change does not mean imitation, the manifestation of an ape instinct, as Bell claims. According to Herbert Spencer, nothing is destroyed in Nature, and what we conceive to be absolutely annihilated, is still there in a different form.

Bell exalts musical and pure visual form above everything else. He is suspicious of what he calls an "alloy" in literature, meaning an intellectual content and the sturdier emotions of life. Here he resembles Wilenski, who, let us remember, wants to eliminate the "mechanical eye" (natural human vision) from art creation. Bell goes astray in his conception of pure musical form. Music conceived by and for the ear is transposed in the imagination of the listener. I do not believe in program-music, but assuredly the composer is entitled to have named his compositions as he felt or imagined them when he composed them. But I, the listener, am fully entitled to abstract from the pure music itself, or even from the title's spirit, an emotion and an imaginative impulse of my own. In this way the stimulated imagination may go on and perform other endeavors or creations. We must have this very "alloy" to strengthen the imagination; it is a powerful factor of any great artistic creation from time immemorial. Would you like literature without the "alloy"? I give you the "poetry" of Gertrude Stein and the painting of the Dadaists. But even at that Miss Stein and our most ardent non-objectivists have to utilize some imagination. Imagination after all means the word image in the literal sense. Hence imagination is objective.

Wilenski and Bell stand together when they write about the Pre-Raphaelite painters. Bell charges that they imitated the least significant manifestations of the Middle Ages and were imaginatively weak. Such a charge has been repeated by other recent critics. To me, however, it appears that these Nineteenth Century artists known as the Pre-Raphaelites, even though far from being giants of art, painted nothing else but the spirit of the Middle Ages and I hold that they were beyond a doubt imaginative to a high degree. These Pre-Raphaelites felt their way into the recesses of the souls of their distant predecessors. They extracted their sense of the ideal from them. (See Figures 11 and 12.)

One more point about Clive Bell and then I shall turn to his associate in Bloomsbury, the late Roger Fry. Bell is an out-and-out snob. He scorns people who think that art has a democratic basis. He asks loftily, "Why should the artist bother about the fate of humanity? If art does not justify itself, esthetic rapture does." This is pure snobbish estheticism, and to it I say, why should artists not concern themselves with the fate of humanity? If an artist can strengthen his creative talent by combining his art-interest with normal and powerful human interests, so much the better; he will produce an art far more virile than mere splashes of color and form. Not long ago a foreign artist was commissioned to paint some murals for a noted building in New York City. He included in his mural a picture of Lenin which aroused such angry controversy that the mural had to be covered up. What this artist had in mind was that his painting of Lenin would enshrine an ideal. It might have been better if he had symbolized the feeling we call "brotherhood of man," an ideal that exerts a universal appeal to the civilized world, though often it is honored in the breach. Lenin might have stood on the highest plane of this ideal to this artist, but it is quite possible that Lenin-worship will change to some greater ideology. Everything is evolution-

ary, and the symbol of Lenin may lose some of its force. But the emotion of human brotherhood is eternal.

There is more to agree with in Roger Fry's writing than in Bell's. Take, for instance, Fry's generalization about the Renaissance. He notes the widening of the currents of art in that period and assigns certain reasons for it, with which I agree. But the limited period before the Renaissance, marked by Gothic architecture, religious devotion and wars nevertheless paved the way for the men of the Renaissance. Yet despite Fry's appraisal of the Renaissance, this great florescence of art does not impress the "moderns" who are bent on creating something of their own, anything so long as it is a departure from the Greeks and the Renaissance and is "different."

Fry also remarks that he owes much to Tolstoi's *What is Art?* although he calls the book perverse. Tolstoi uses an example of a boy's experience in escaping from a bear and shows how this boy might communicate his emotions, communication of emotions being, to Tolstoi, art. The Romantic painters, let me say in passing, understood very well the communication of emotions.

I think that Fry is less than just in his remarks upon William Blake. Blake like Gustave Doré was not a great colorist but both men possessed truly remarkable talents for imagination. It is a pity that they did not perfect themselves as colorists, but critics like Fry, Bell and Wilenski undervalue the imagination which such men display:

Fry repeats Clive Bell's case for the irrelevance of representative form, and I repeat that "significant form" turns out to be pretty meaningless. Form must be coupled with imagination to stir the emotions. But Fry shows some critical sense of his friend's theory. He does not swallow it whole but asks searching questions about this isolated purely esthetic quality. His questions prompt me to say that "significant form" in the end is nothing but a creative arrangement of harmonious color and form.

Fry's fetish is what he calls the "creative vision" or a "fourth kind of vision" which is a pretty thin and detached business as he describes it. To be blunt about it, I would say that creative vision is nothing but the imaginative quality that the artist derives through the medium of human sight. The forms and color imaginatively bodied forth can sometimes make a color symphony capable of stirring the human soul to its depths. Nor does it follow, as Fry claims, that the artist's actual vision becomes distorted by the emphasis of the rhythm set up within him. For the artist to receive his inspiration, the vision does not necessarily become distorted.

In taking leave of Fry and Bloomsbury, I want to recur to Tolstoi. I too admire Tolstoi's courage in changing radically his views of the world, and his famous example of the boy retelling his story of escape from a bear for the sake of his enjoyment of his emotions in retrospect is provocative of many reflections, as Fry shows. But I must say here that Tolstoi—and my stricture holds for Plato too—was not qualified to judge works of art. Their gifts converged on thought and philosophy, and they never studied art in the sense that those study it who make art their life-work. Consequently, while their philosophic views are important, we must remember that philosophy by itself has never solved any of the central vital problems of human experience, such as the sphinx-like question, what is art?

These views of mine may disturb the worshipers of these great thinkers. But indiscriminate hero-worshipers always remind me of a man, an Italian hero-worshiper, who greatly admired his neighbor's skill with the flute. He prevailed upon his neighbor to request an audition at the Metropolitan Opera House. When the aspirant was rejected, his admirer, who was present at the audition, shouted at the maestro: "Dat-a man cannot play? Dat-a man cannot play? Why, dat-a man, he fight-a with Garibaldi!"

The fact that Plato condemned mimicry in art does not



mean that he understood art as a whole. What he said could be as well applied to music or the drama. Tolstoi's *Confession* is to be admired. It should not be considered a form of fickleness but an act of great sincerity. To acknowledge one's mistakes is a courageous act. I fully share Tolstoi's exalting the sentiment of the brotherhood of man, but profound a thinker as he was, Tolstoi was yet not qualified to judge the art of painting.

## Chapter XIV

### THE MIRAGE OF NON-OBJECTIVE ART

One might suspect that something called "non-objective art" is nothing but a mirage from the way its devotees write about it. The language of its worshipers like Hilla Rebay of the Museum of Non-Objective Art is cloudy and diffuse. They never speak concretely about this art but rhapsodize with vague words like "cosmic," "eternal rhythm," "genius," "realm of spirit," and so on. These words are all right in a firm context of thought, but when there is no such context and everything is general without concrete references, one grows suspicious of whether the writer is talking sense. Is it something real or only a mirage that is inspiring this gush of self-proclaimed spirituality, the canny reader is certain to wonder.

I shall suggest a simple exercise. Look at a box. Geometrically considered, it is a cube. Now take a side of this box away. The separated side has now lost the name of "box." It has become a square. If you please, it has become "non-objective." Similarly, a table or a chair can be broken down into geometrical shapes. Well and good, but the imagination then enters and suggests the object or form from the parts that have been separated. And by the way, why should we call a cube or another geometrical formation non-objective? It is what it is: a geometrical object.

Now note that when an artist makes an abstraction from Nature, from an object or from a religious expression in art, he may use this abstraction as a basis upon which to build a concrete conception. This is what the Pre-Raphaelite artists did; they employed their imaginations to abstract from medieval art and to make concrete expressions of their

own art, as anyone can recognize without necessarily sharing their views. This process has nothing in common with the so-called "non-objective artists."

Miss Rebay and others who praise the linear geometric structures of Kandinsky, Klee, and other "non-objectivists" are at fault in another important respect. (See Figures 15 and 16.) Out of their clouds of words one finally distinguishes that they are comparing such artists' works to works of music. This is quite fallacious. "Non-objective art" is static. Music is fugitive. And therefore only vibrative prismatic colors will lend themselves to anything that might in painting be considered analogous to music. The closest approach to music in painting, although the men themselves might have been unmusical, has been in Turner with his harmonies of color, and in Monet, Monticelli, and Seurat in their prismatic effects.

The "non-objectivists" talk about their "non-objective art," but to carry matters to an extreme, let me introduce Anatole France who claimed that not only was objective art impossible but so, he added, is objective criticism impossible. Anatole France, of course, had a philosophy that art and probably life too were illusions. The promulgators of non-objectivity in art, I surmise, must logically be forced to admit that their own art is an illusion, or mirage.

Now to face the question openly, is there such a thing as non-objective art? Is this the art of tomorrow, as some have claimed? My answer is that non-objective art has in a sense been with us for centuries without this label. The dots, squares, circles, even the very pigments of these pretentious paintings are objective. Everything that is interpreted by our senses is objective by definition, and even invisible matter, like germs which our senses cannot perceive, is nevertheless there, and is therefore objective. Any whole broken down to its elements, even to molecules, is nevertheless objective. When the elements are synthesized, they form a whole again, which we name a pencil, a chair, a table,

etc. Of course, if we take into account our cosmic relations, *everything* might be not only non-objective but perhaps illusionary, a dream, should we wish to reason that way. But we are dealing with something that is concrete according to our understanding through our senses.

Go back to the second paragraph in this essay where I suggested a little exercise. The point of this exercise is that when we look at "non-objective" paintings, our mental faculties including the imagination are at work creating images; these images make the subject matter of these paintings very objective indeed. Have we not all gazed at a cloud and imagined it to be a figure of something or a landscape? Even the configuration of the moon suggests a "man in the moon."

The patterns of certain rare Oriental rugs or porcelains, designed centuries before this craze for "non-objective" art, exhibit arabesques made of circles and other geometrical designs that summon our imaginations to see objects in their patterns. Even dreams are objective to the dreamer. And the painter (surrealist) who paints dreams uses his imagination, and his imagination is based on images. Objective matter can no more be dispensed with in art than it can be in science. The objective stirs our imagination. It matters not whether they were symbolic, religious, philosophical, or historical in their treatment, the greatest artists of the world in the past were objective painters.

And yet I have heard artists of today who paint imaginatively and objectively called "whimsies" by patronizing art critics. Shades of Michelangelo, Mantegna, and Poussin! We cannot take seriously the claim that art which is tied down to a model machine or to a railroad yard or a man in overalls should rank above the free-ranging creations of the imagination.

After the vaporous writings of certain art critics swinging censers in front of the shrine of "non-objective art," what a refreshment it is to turn to the common sense of a

psychologist. "It requires imagination to enjoy art as well as to produce it," says Dr. Robert S. Woodworth, the noted psychologist. "Without images that form imagination, how can one enjoy art?" He adds that "imagination and invention are much the same." The following from Woodworth is especially well said: "Art from the consumer's side is play, it is play of the imagination with the materials conveniently presented by the artist."

Here is the conclusion that the advocates of "non-objective" art lead us to. They assert loudly that they do not believe in images. Very well, then they are themselves saying that they have no imagination. Let us readily grant them their argument since it leads to such a conclusion. Like a mirage, "non-objective" art loses its charm as one comes nearer to it and studies just what it is.

## Chapter XV

### THE CULT OF CÉZANNE AND THE TEST OF TIME

ONE OF THE most extravagant phenomena in the art world of our period has been the cult of Cézanne. His numerous worshipers have made him a figure that has dominated many conversations about modern art, even if perhaps he has not achieved real dominance over the painters of the past. This is the key in which Cézanne enthusiasts have written about the French painter. To R. H. Wilenski the modern movement was founded by Cézanne and Seurat, and he says that they did nothing less than rescue painting from the technical degeneration of the Nineteenth Century. They concentrated, he asserts, on the creation of architectural symbols for formal relations and prepared for the coming of the architectural idea of the art of painting.

Albert C. Barnes, the art collector and founder of the Barnes Foundation, is even more rhapsodic. "His (Cézanne's) manner of using color represents an originality and economy of means comparable to Rembrandt's," Barnes affirms, "and is perhaps even better than Rembrandt's because color is in itself richer than chiaroscuro; it has more possibilities and is more distinctively the material in the medium of painting."

Both Leonardo and Rembrandt, the great masters of their time, employed chiaroscuro for specific effects. The art of light and shade carries with it a great emotional and vibrative expression. For this reason chiaroscuro is as important as is color in its medium. But if Rembrandt and Leonardo wished to use colors, they did so splendidly, in

spite of the fact that the intervening centuries have obliterated much of the tone quality.

But the loudest singer of all in the chorus extolling Cézanne was Clive Bell. The debt of contemporary art to Cézanne, Bell declares, is hard to compute, and one cannot even guess what the future will owe to him. What would the artists of talent and genius today have done were it not for the discoveries of Cézanne? Bell has coined an especially extravagant phrase, one that has often been quoted, to do justice to Cézanne. The Frenchman, he declared, is "the Christopher Columbus of a continent of form."

Impressed by all this praise, hundreds of painters have assiduously imitated Cézanne.

In the meantime, the decades have been passing. Time does indeed march on, and in its passing tests silently the worth of all claims made for an artist. How does Cézanne stand up even after a comparatively short test by time? The Second World War brings forward some very dramatic evidence in reply to this question, but I reserve it until the end of this essay.

Wilenski's judgment about the position of Cézanne and Seurat, quoted above, can, I think, safely be left to impartial time. What Barnes has to say can also be left to the action of time, for he is comparing Cézanne's comparatively recent colors with the centuries-old colors of Rembrandt. It is quite reasonable to assume that Rembrandt's colors were more brilliant when fresh and have deteriorated with age. I wonder how sure Mr. Barnes is that Cézanne's colors will stand up for three hundred years. Clive Bell's rhetoric—he says that Cézanne stands as high as one in ten thousand artists—is self-defeating; it is obviously opinionated and in the nature of a wild guess. This continent of form that Christopher Columbus Cézanne is alleged to have discovered will, I am confident, turn out to be just a mirage.

Cézanne has received plenty of adverse criticism, detraction and even clever ridicule. But an odd thing happened.

Somehow his fame grew on adverse criticism. Today, however, the critical tide seems really to be turning against him. He is no longer an enigma. Craven can explain what Cézanne was trying to do and then add that "upon his experiments in method were erected the numerous modernist cults which shrieked their way into the limelight and enjoyed a brief moment of notoriety." In this essay I shall deal with a different and devastating kind of criticism, the criticism that facts and actions, not words, perform upon the swollen reputation of Cézanne.

As an example of a fact that severely criticizes Cézanne, consider that he has had numerous imitators. There are two kinds of art: the inimitable and the imitable. The greatest art is the first kind. Very few have ever had the hardihood to attempt imitation of Turner, Wagner, or Shakespeare; the few who tried failed ignominiously. The world has recognized these as inimitable; that is part of their greatness. But hundreds have hastened to imitate Cézanne, an implied recognition that he was imitable and not therefore in the highest rank.

I mentioned above that derogatory criticism of Cézanne was somehow a factor in building up his reputation. For that we must thank the French art dealer, Monsieur A. Vollard. Vollard had something of Phineas T. Barnum in his make-up. He knew how to advertise. You might say, too, that he was something of a Svengali and had a hypnotic influence upon disciples and other dealers. What M. Vollard did was to advertise deliberately the adverse criticisms of Cézanne. He proceeded on the theory that a knock could be a boost, if adroitly handled, and he revealed himself as a shrewd student of human nature. It was Lincoln, however, who said that you cannot fool all of the people all of the time.

For example, in *La Revue* for December 15, 1905, Camille Mauclair wrote that "as for M. Cézanne, his name will be connected for all time with the memorable artistic



pleasantry of the past fifteen years." Maclair called Cézanne's works "the shapeless attempts of a man who has more good will than knowledge." In *Le Gil Blas* for October 5, 1906, Vauxelles said of Cézanne: "Really, the joke has lasted too long." In *Le Figaro* for October 25, 1906, Arsène Alexandre spoke of Cézanne's "absolute impotence to arrive at his goal. . . . Art cannot be enriched simply by good intentions." Although I quote these critics, honesty compels me to add that I personally am not generally influenced by critics.

Now as readers of Ambroise Vollard's book on Cézanne know, Vollard seized avidly upon such notices as have just been quoted and exploited them for his own ends. He made Cézanne a central figure of controversy and created a market for his works.

The Cézanne market did indeed boom, and into it rushed some of our millionaires. Over one hundred thousand dollars has been paid for a Cézanne "masterpiece"—a fact that awes some people. Yet if these people knew that in the storerooms of many of our museums one can see pictures for which fortunes were once paid, they would not be so awed. Once these discarded paintings were thought to be by Columbus of new continents of form, but time has been harsh to them.

Today the "best" Cézannes are in America. Why? Because our millionaires are both big-hearted and naive. In the esthetic realm they suffer from an inferiority complex. They wish to conceal this by getting something advertised as "different" so as to elevate themselves in the eyes of the world. The French dealers collaborated nicely with American dealers in a merry dance of dollars for Cézannes and other "modern" works. Of course, there are also persons in France who own Cézannes, but these have been hypnotized into awe by the dizzy prices of the foreign markets, chiefly the American market, for Cézannes.

A hundred thousand dollars is, of course, quite an im-

pressive bit of money, but while we are talking of market prices, let us remind ourselves that this sum which bought a "best" Cézanne certainly would not buy the "best" Rembrandt nor the "best" Titian. Before the war would the French Republic have accepted even a million dollars for its best Leonardo or Raphael, or would England have parted with its best Turner? Italy has long placed a ban on the export of its Old Masters, but gladly exported its futurists and Modiglianis to America. Barnes's judgment that Cézanne is greater than Rembrandt is not reflected in the realm of higher finance.

Returning from the market to esthetics, the truth about Cézanne, as I see it, has been partly expressed by Elie Faure, who feels that when the painter has forgotten architecture and sculpture, a stirring music arises from his colors. I agree that what Faure calls Cézanne's "musical imagination" is better than his architectural qualities and theories, but his musical imagination lacks the fugitive vibrant quality that great music possesses. His work in the final analysis is very questionable in its achievement of individuality, both in color and form.

Roger Fry mentions in *Vision and Design* that Herr Von Tschudi, the noted art connoisseur, showed him the *Laocoön* of El Greco which he had purchased for Munich. Von Tschudi said to Fry: "Do you know why we admire El Greco's handling so much? Because he reminds us of Cézanne." (See Figures 17 and 18.)

With all due respect to Von Tschudi and Roger Fry, the frank admission is here: Cézanne was not original but an obvious imitator, though a poor one, of El Greco. He copied in his time the masters in the Louvre. He admired Poussin and was influenced by El Greco; the fact is that what he tried to take from El Greco was quite inferior imitation.

I think that time will show that whereas the Old Masters built on foundations that have stood and will stand, Cézanne sailed for an illusory continent. Too little time has elapsed

since Cézanne's death for Clive Bell to be so confident. Before this, painters have been accepted in one century only to be rejected in the next.

I assured the reader, however, that I would adduce facts rather than verbal opinions about Cézanne and what is happening to his reputation as time goes on, and I shall close with an item from Edward Alden Jewell's column in *The New York Times* for August 9, 1942. On this occasion Mr. Jewell told of the precautionary measures the Frick Museum had taken against possible air raids by the enemy. Most of the Old Masters, he said, had been removed from the Frick Museum to places of greater safety, and in the list were Duccio, Piero della Francesca, Bellini, Holbein, Velasquez, Veronese, Tintoretto, Rembrandt, Vermeer, Chardin, Goya, Gainsborough, Ingres, Romney, Hogarth, Lawrence, Fragonard, and Boucher. But what struck me forcibly was that most of the Nineteenth Century painters have been left on display to take their chances with the rain of bombs. Among those left was Cézanne.

Now why if, as Clive Bell insists, Cézanne was the Columbus of form and if, as Mr. Barnes claims, he was superior to Rembrandt as a colorist, should Cézanne be left behind? Why is he left in view of the fact that a noted financier lately paid \$110,000 for *The Bathers*?

Well, here is a practical test. This action is concrete; there are no illusions about it. Time, the only judge in the long run, is already proving that Cézanne and these other "masters" of the Nineteenth Century have not conveyed any fundamental message to the world. And so the world treats them in time of war with less concern than it treats the Old Masters.

I wish to add a postscript to the foregoing paper since perhaps after all a few esthetic judgments on Cézanne should be recorded as well as the verdict time is pronouncing, especially as both time and esthetics are in agreement. In

approaching Cézanne, the question arises, why copy Nature? Most critics find the greatness of an artist not in his copying Nature, for Nature has already given us her great creations. But we are at liberty to abstract from Nature the inspiration on which to build our own ideologies. Our powers of expression in describing Nature in any medium—pigments or poetry or stone—are greatly limited. Assuming a great poet describes a sunset, I assure you that no matter how moving his words are, you will not understand him as well as he understood his personal experience in gazing at the sunset. The language of dogs or birds is quite limited, we all readily concede. Human language has its limits, too.

No, in Cézanne the "significant form" talked about by Clive Bell and the "architectural form" of Wilenski are sadly absent. Cézanne's "form" may be *different* but the central question is not whether it is different but whether it has esthetic significance. To me he is a mediocre painter, a copyist of El Greco and others, with a hashed-up style. Imagination, the great factor in painting, is lacking in Cézanne, with his wooden apples and very badly painted figures. His "cubes, cones and cylinders" which he saw in Nature delude the public; they were seized upon as mystical and mystifying propaganda by that expert public relations counsel, M. Vollard. These geometrics are said to have influenced the cubists and futurists and others who have wasted their time on a theory which some attribute to strabismus, Cézanne's eye affliction. This is hypothetical, but whatever caused the result, the result obstructed the course of art. And as for the Cézanne colors—they are commonplace and even shabby, the sure indicia of a mediocre painter.

To worship Cézanne more than Monet or Renoir is ridiculous. As a landscape painter, despite all the cant about the "architectural form" of his trees, how can anyone compare his landscapes with those of the soul-stirring Turner or the poetic Corot or any other first rank landscapist? I do not even classify Cézanne as an Anthropo-Eccentric

painter. The blunt truth is that he was simply a man who tried hard to give the world something different that would be valuable. He did not succeed, as the testing of time already reveals.

It is amazing to see the accumulation upon accumulation of adulation for Cézanne's work by writers and critics who keep cropping up. I must add a word about the almost hysterical worship of Cézanne by Roger Fry, who was one of the earliest admirers. Occasionally I agree with Fry, although mostly I am in disagreement. In his book on Cézanne, Fry gives a meticulous analysis of this artist's colors, brush strokes, planes and modulations of pigmentary effects. Also he remarks that as Cézanne progresses, his touches become more liquid and transparent like water color. But I say that all this and more was simply the discarded experiments of his predecessors, who really had imaginative qualities. People who have studied the Old Masters are not impressed by Fry's elaborate analysis of Cézanne's delineations and contours and color, all as rudimentary as a child's drawings. The uninitiated may be impressed by the profundity of the phraseology of Fry and other Cézanne-cultists; the words may hypnotize some people. It matters not if Cézanne is reverently represented in all the museums of the world and propagandized by art dealers manipulating mob psychology. My words may have no effect. But time will tell!

## Chapter XVI

### WHY ART CRITICS?

I AM AN INVETERATE reader of art criticism, yet the ungrateful thought has often crossed my mind, are art critics necessary? There are numerous creations in industrial life, about which the public shows good judgment, that flourish without a corps of professional critics to interpret, appreciate, deprecate or otherwise judge. Take all the models of automobiles, for instance. The newspapers do not think it necessary to engage an automobile critic to be a liaison man between the new model and the public.

But the taste of most of the public in art is ignorant and rudimentary, I imagine someone saying. The public must be instructed and enlightened. The trouble is that the critic finds he cannot enlighten the ignorant because the ignorant, it turns out, cannot understand the critic. The public that isn't totally ignorant and has developed a little taste produces more trouble, because this public tends promptly to rely upon the taste of the critic. It knows, or thinks it knows, that it is not capable of real judgment, and so falls back upon what it is told. This is not good, because no critic can be of infallible taste. Today he is likely to be a person swayed by Anthro-po-Eccentric feeling. If so, he comes into conflict with the taste of a concentric-minded person in his audience, and this person, unless quite sure of himself, will feel confused. The only answer seems to be that the public must develop its own taste. Is that impossible?

Observing that in the more obvious arts like the cinema and drama, the public has developed its own standard taste, I do not think that a similar development is altogether impossible in painting. The standard taste in the arts just

mentioned doesn't appear to need critics to guide it. But painting is less understood and the demand for predigested esthetic responses is extremely strong. The critic tries to satisfy this demand. The connoisseur of art, however, does not depend upon the critic and has no need of him.

The public usually prefer to have someone else do the thinking for them in many branches of endeavor. It is not so much that the public cannot fathom the problems themselves as that they are mentally lazy. Perhaps it is the influence of the machine age that has robbed us of a good deal of our thinking ability. We do not in many instances stop to calculate and analyze for ourselves because the machine has assumed that responsibility for us. Consequently our own mental machinery grows rusty. As it had happened in politics, so it is happening in art; we cease to make decisions for ourselves. The political dish is made ready for the public to swallow by editorial flavor, which may be honest or dishonest. How many of our good citizens select their candidates without the influence of others? So it is in art, too.

There are moods in which I feel that criticism of art is a waste of time. From time immemorial, art judgments have been contradictory and reversed by later generations. Time is the great power. In art there has been many a General Mitchell who has been jeered at by the critics for his pioneering work. But time has rebuked the critics of Billy Mitchell, the prophet of air power, and proved that he, not his critics, was correct, and so it has been in art. Yet art critics must make a livelihood in some way. I can only suggest that it might be better for them to stick to analysis and information in the newspapers and desert the task of education they have assumed.

Walt Disney, that genius of the cinema, was asked by the novelist Huxley how he had arrived at the underlying subtleties of his animated cartoons. Mr. Disney answered

very simply, "We make pictures for entertainment, and then the professors tell us what they mean."

Well, for better or worse, necessary or not, the art critics are with us and they will go on expressing their taste and trying to make their taste universal. May I playfully advance a suggestion derived from reading the newspapers during these war days? We all know the warning the papers print about news dispatches from enemy sources and about censorship. The papers themselves say to take a good deal of war news with at least a grain of salt. I am not exactly implying that an art critic's review emanates from an "enemy source," although many an artist at one time or another has been inclined to think so, but it would be amusing (and salutary too!) if above each art critic's column in a newspaper there was printed in bold, black type the following notice: *Warning—This column represents the views of one person only, a fallible mortal like the rest of us.*

I am sure that the reader, after perusing an acid, cantankerous criticism of a book or a play, has said to himself: "The man who wrote that must have been suffering from indigestion." As a matter of fact, the physical condition of an art critic and his past subjective life inevitably enter into his judgments. Suppose that a critic of painting is indisposed; he may not have had enough sleep the night before or celebrated too enthusiastically; he may have personal troubles on his mind. Thus handicapped, he sets forth to review several exhibitions containing scores of paintings. Under those circumstances he is apt to dismiss with a clever line the lifetime message of an artist whose work requires not just a few minutes of looking but careful and repeated study. Sometimes, to be fair, it is not the critic's fault. The gallery may be poorly lighted, and the critic is annoyed by this and is peremptory and hasty in his judgment of the unfortunate artist.

Then there is the past emotional life of the critic. Accidentally and subconsciously he has formed unpleasant as-



sociations with certain color effects; just as accidentally and unknowingly he has acquired pleasant associations with other color effects. Thus we can get "slanted" reviews from the critic, written in all honesty, in which extraneous psychological reactions have the upper hand.

Besides the "warning" I have another constructive suggestion to make, and that is that there should be a rebuttal department attached to the art department in newspapers. Would it not be turnabout and fair play if the publications employing art critics always reserved a little space for a letter of reasonable length from the artist who has been criticized? In this letter, if he so chose, the battered artist could explain and defend his point of view and put his case up to the judgment of the public.

I say that this would be fair play because it sometimes happens that well known artists exhibiting throughout the country have found their work reviewed by mere youngsters, almost cub reporters on the local paper. These youngsters, whose training to view an exhibition intelligently consists only of a superficial knowledge of art picked up in a fine arts course at college conducted by an instructor only one step ahead of his pupils, are turned loose to be clever at the expense of mature painters. Yet some of these kindergarten critics have been known to be unable to distinguish between a chromo and a painting! Their "reviews," when they appear, are often imitative of the arguments of the more publicized writers on "modern" art who in turn are not infallible guides.

The worst pest is the exhibitionistic critic who even under normal physical conditions—that is, when he is feeling fit—is unable to grasp the idea or goal of the artist. No artist himself, without the slightest knowledge of the technique of painting, and with no imagination, you would think he would be deterred from printing his opinion. Not he! He cooks a dish of verbiage for the public, covering his confused meaning with a thick sauce of profound and pedantic

phrases, flavoring it with a dash of satire and humor (usually at the artist's cost) and garnishing it with a spray of flowery hyperbole. He is a verbal exhibitionist, not a true connoisseur of painting.

Many critics are especially fond of the word "decorative." It is used in a belittling sense. When a critic comes to a painting that he does not consider worthy of analysis, or for any reason considers unimportant in its quality, it is at least ten to one that he will apply the word "decorative" to it. He uses this word like a rubber stamp, never having stopped to think that decorativeness should be the attribute of any great art. In painting, decorativeness is like melody in a piece of music. Did not Michelangelo add decorativeness to the Sistine Chapel? (See Figures 19 and 20.) Are not Botticelli, Veronese, Fra Angelico, and Turner decorative? Paintings are surely not picture puzzles. Their special aim is to enhance the esthetic consciousness of the spectator. Yes, I dare to use the abused word: their special aim is to decorate.

Naturally, I am not maintaining that there are not some critics with receptive minds, men who are sincere and unprejudiced, who grasp the true significance of an artist's efforts. Some could be named who by their constructive criticism have been instrumental in developing the artist's talent. I could also name a number of competent artists today who, while they may have winced under the verbal lashing of a critic, nevertheless took note of his words and thereby improved their work.

And I would be the last to deny that there are many bad painters, too, amateurs nursing delusions of becoming famous artists. No honest critic could sing the praises of these "also rans." But—and here I recur to my suggestion of a rebuttal department—even these deluded artists should be given the right of refutation in the art departments of publications. Rest assured, dear reader, that bad painting,

like bad music or bad literature, will not have the resources to defend itself.

My final constructive suggestion—granting that art critics have a limited usefulness—is that critics would be still more useful if they put the public on the alert against three things: artists with social prestige and no talent, sensational publicity about the lives of artists, and the fallibility of museum acceptance of paintings. A word about each of these. Now and then an artist of the Social Register type crashes the imposing portals of some of our influential and fashionable art galleries, not by merit but by his social prestige. I have observed that when visiting these awesome premises some of our critics, fearing to commit *lèse-majesty* against the dealer-owner, have awarded these social darlings very benevolent notices indeed. It would not be hard to educate the public to the fact that social position has nothing to do with artistic merit. Equally simple is the next point: sensational publicity about an artist's personal life should not be used as a foundation for his reputation as a painter. The American artist Blakelock and the over-rated Van Gogh come to mind; Van Gogh's insane antics were even recorded in a best-seller book. The works of both men rose in the financial scale, but what their ultimate standing as artists, stripped of sensationalism, will be, only time will answer.

The third job is a clear-cut one. The critics can, and should, inform the public on all suitable occasions that the acceptance of a painting by a museum is subject to the dictates of time. No amount of present-day success, such as prizes awarded by juries, museum purchases, and the like is a guarantee of permanent estimation. It is more like the success a Broadway play achieves. A few seasons later it is seen that the Broadway success exerted no permanent influence. It is well that the critics should occasionally remind the public of what lies in the basements of museums, namely, the "successful" paintings of the past, the selectors of which

never dreamed that their successors would not see eye to eye with them.

If critics performed some of the modest tasks here indicated, the question, why art critics? would not so often be voiced.

As often happens, one story leads on to another, and I am reminded of Whistler, about whom so many anecdotes are told, and his painting of his mother that hangs in the Luxembourg Museum in Paris. I should say that this painting artistically resembles a two dimensional pancake, even though the French government about a decade ago, so I am told, refused a half million dollars for it. Why should this august art institution of Paris have given it up when every American visiting Paris would have considered his sojourn in that city incomplete unless he had viewed the painting whose fame had been enhanced by the famous Whistler-Ruskin court battle? France has been foremost in utilizing art as a business medium. Line me up with Ruskin who did not appreciate Whistler as an artist either. What put Whistler over was his famous trial and the propaganda that grew out of it. The most that can be said for Whistler is that he was a capable etcher. To be blunt about it, Whistler's painting of his mother has the intrinsic artistic merit of Emanuel Leutze's *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, recently demoted by the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I have often wondered how this small sailing craft (since the picture is a realistic portrayal) could have withstood its load without capsizing!

A little story will round off my thinking on this question. In ancient Greece, we are told, an artist painted a landscape which showed a bird perched on a stalk of corn. The picture was accepted by everyone to be a true representation of Nature. By everyone, that is, except a peasant, who dissented from the critics and admirers and stoutly exclaimed, "This picture is false and untrue to Nature!" "Why?" they demanded of him. "Very simple," replied the peasant.

"Look at the stalk of corn. See how frail it is. Now notice this heavy bird perched on it. Don't you think that this stalk should give a little with the bird's weight instead of standing up so straight?"

What this story illustrates is obvious. Very frequently an unskilled person or a layman with an "innocent eye" will have a better perspective for certain art judgments than the heavily "conditioned" art critic. The story is a lesson in humility of judgment for the professional critic.

Part V

SOME SECONDARY ISSUES



## Chapter XVII

### ON THE METHODS OF ART DETECTIVES

THERE IS A SIDE of the art world which has a great appeal to the general public. It does not have much to do with the esthetic merits of paintings but entirely with the question of their genuineness. Were they really painted by the man to whom they are assigned? Are they spurious or fraudulent in some way? Has a mistake been made in ascribing them? Such questions are connected with "market values" in which the big public is always interested, especially when as with the Old Masters the prices paid are very considerable ones.

Experts are called in to give decisions about the authenticity of signatures, and many people follow controversies about whether a work is an original or a copy with the sort of attention they give to a mystery novel. And indeed the expert is often cast in the role of Sherlock Holmes. Many anecdotes of the uncovering of forgeries in art have a true detective story quality. I have done my share of art detective work.

First, let me note that even experts make mistakes. There is confusion, for instance, about the works of Cimabue and Duccio. Cimabue, who was born about 1260, was considered in his day the "father of modern painting." (You see how relative the word "modern" is.) He was Italy's first great painter although he still clung to the Byzantine school. His fame has been enhanced by the fact that Giotto was his pupil. It is a fact that some of Cimabue's paintings have been ascribed to the Siennese painter Duccio, and this mistaken ascription has been made not by ordinary students of painting but by several art connoisseurs.

Connoisseurs have also gone wrong on El Greco and his



son, Jorge Manuel Theotocopuli. Jorge was an assiduous imitator of his father, and some of his paintings are confused with El Greco's.

Indeed it must be admitted that several museums in America and abroad have quite a few paintings on their walls of questionable authenticity. Some are spurious, some are wrongly attributed. A well known instance is No. 196 at the Brussels Museum, a painting that has two signatures, Van Goyen and Cuyp, and three dates.

Even the greatest of art experts make honest mistakes about the genuineness of the Old Masters. One of the greatest was the late Dr. Bode of the Kaiser Friedrich Museum, a gentleman of high integrity and sincere devotion to his art. I have had the pleasure of discussing many an art problem of Old Masters in the *sanctum sanctorum* of the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin where he was director, and he made many a serious error in his judgment of the Old Masters. But, as Pope said, "To err is human," and in defense of the art expert I can only observe that if some latitude is allowed to the medical profession for making mistakes, I fail to see why infallibility is demanded of the art expert.

Thus far I have been speaking of the honest mistakes of specially trained connoisseurs. Their problem is complicated by the fact that in the Renaissance some of the Old Masters were kept extremely busy and were assisted in filling their orders by star pupils. Their clever pupils were disciplined not to "express themselves," as is so fashionable in our period, but to learn to paint in the style of their teacher. They became expert craftsmen in the vein of their masters. They would execute a painting, and the master would add a finishing touch here and there with his brush to give it the authentic stamp. It is known that Rubens, Van Dyck and even Rembrandt did this, the last even affixing his signature. By now these touched-up paintings have the stamp of age upon them, and there must be thousands of them supposedly

by the Old Masters but in reality by highly talented pupils. It was the teacher-student custom of the time and not intended to hoodwink later ages.

Some of our contemporaries, however, try to forge primitives. These are painted on old panels and old gilding, the colors are baked, there are holes in the wood to make them look more antique; even chemical treatment is applied to make the wood look moldy. It's all very cleverly done by imitators who might even be called artists in their own line.

Of course, there are many artists who repeated their own work many times. These repetitions are called *replicas*, not copies. Our own Gilbert Stuart, for instance, made more than two hundred replicas of the George Washington painting to fill the popular demand of his day. A *copy* is an imitation of another artist's work. Yet a number of celebrated painters of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries were employed by patrons to copy some of the Old Masters. These are rare cases. But it is to be noted that even while these copies were executed by famous artists, they could be detected as such by true experts with the aid of the magnifying glass and modern scientific experimentation.

The signatures of artists or their omissions may have two interpretations. When an artist affixes his signature, it may be interpreted that he is proud of his work, and so wishes to notify the world that it is his. But there have been some of the greatest artists of the world, who were so imbued with the importance of their art that they completely dropped their signatures, so that the work alone became their signature by which the world should recognize them, as if their work were their handwriting. Speaking of signatures, would it not be a good idea if artists of today were to affix their fingerprints to their paintings, to some part of the back of the canvas, so that forgeries will be eliminated?

Of course, an art expert requires much more than taste. He must have a detailed knowledge of the lives of painters

and must know all the facts he can glean about their methods of work. For example, it's a good thing to know that Reynolds experimented in chemistry. There was an art dealer who didn't, and thereby hangs an auction tale. This dealer purchased a Reynolds portrait for one thousand guineas at Christie's, London, and thought to improve his acquisition by cleaning it. Unfortunately, instead of testing the pigments at the edge of the canvas background he spread the cleaning solution over the painting and with a dab of cotton attempted to remove the varnish. To his consternation, not only the varnish but the pigments too "swam off" and the white of the canvas appeared. The expensive painting was completely ruined. Excitedly the dealer demanded the return of his money from Christie's, charging he had been sold a fake. If only he had known that Reynolds had experimentally dabbled in chemistry and at certain times had used beeswax to mix his pigments! This was explained to him by experts at Christie's. Too late he learned his rashness in not making a test before attempting the cleaning of the whole canvas.

Vibert, the Nineteenth Century French painter, mixed his colors with resin varnish and benzine, using no oil. Therefore one must be as cautious in cleaning his paintings as with Reynolds. They will not stand the strength of alcohol and turpentine. I would like to mention, *en passant*, the brilliance of the reds Vibert employed in the draperies of his Cardinals and other figures. They are unusually well preserved, for the color red is subject more or less to disintegration. If protected from the elements of Nature, these colors of Vibert may hold on for a great length of time.

By the way, speaking of pictures that have been over-cleaned, although not ruined, there is a Turner at the Metropolitan Museum and some others that have been cleaned too much.

The art public is either gullible or naive or simply ignorant. As I have mentioned elsewhere, the art of paint-

ing is the least understood of all the arts, and people will buy the worst discards of an artist who has received fame. Studio scraps, early efforts of his poorest period—these are as eagerly accepted by picture buyers as are his best paintings. This could not happen in music or poetry. We never hear the bad compositions of Mozart or Beethoven or read the bad poems of Keats or Shelley, for the reason that too many people recognize their defects. This is not so with art. What an injustice it is to artists!

There are many people, who have either purchased or inherited a painting, who cherish it because they have faith in its authenticity. It may be a spurious painting or simply a copy, but it was sold or given to them in good faith as being a work of art by a master. So each such person lives with the painting throughout his life, enjoying it, admiring it, and proud to hand it down to a posterity that in turn will hand it down with the same belief in its genuineness. The tragic moment and utter disillusionment comes when one is confronted by circumstances that force a sale, and one discovers to one's utter chagrin that the cherished heirloom is only a sham.

A remark in Wilenski's *Modern Movement in Art* once caused me to reflect that very few art critics, including Wilenski and connoisseurs and for that matter art students, are familiar with the pigmentary analysis of paintings and with various pigmentary methods. Stuart, for instance, in order to bring out the value of his blue tones, first laid in the undertones in blue. Turner in his Venetian period used black as his base, and that is why his paintings have a vibrant luminosity. Our own Hudson River School painter, George Inness, had his own pigmentary procedure. At times in certain of his phases he laid in a background of reds. This was a fact unknown to a young girl art student whom I watched one day at the Metropolitan Museum copying one of Inness's landscapes. She copied it to perfection but could not get the tone value. Taking pity on her exasperation, I

told her of how Inness laid in his undertone, and I am sure that in her next trial she achieved the result she desired.

My own method in color-music is to use one medium in "tone-value" but to use it in variegated shades of color so as to parallel the musical phrase or motif in its minor or major keys.

I have had a number of experiences as a detector of the genuine and false in paintings, and perhaps the reader will be amused by some of these. There was the portrait by Gainsborough which a collector asked me to pass judgment upon. Now the head, as I examined it, was characteristically and assuredly Gainsborough, but the draperies and other accessories and the landscape I just as definitely concluded were by another artist and had been painted about fifty years ago. How can you be certain? asked the collector. I thereupon made the pigmentary test and showed him that the part I asserted was by Gainsborough did not come off upon application of the "remover," whereas the accessory parts "swam off." That convinced the collector but for myself I did not require such proof, for the handling of the parts of the picture not by Gainsborough was obviously foreign to Gainsborough's talents. Originally, this painting had been a study of a head, an unfinished portrait by Gainsborough. Some unscrupulous person had had it "finished."

Some years ago there was a dispute over the authenticity of a painting alleged to be by a popular Nineteenth Century artist. The dispute was taken to court and I was called as a witness. The complainant had bought the painting from a small dealer who had assured the buyer that the painting was authentic and even signed. Then someone had plausibly informed the buyer that the picture was a fake. After a quick glance at the picture I declared that it had not been painted by the artist to whom it was attributed. The judge asked me how positive I was and I in turn asked him if I could make a little test with cotton and remover fluid. I made the test near the edge of the canvas. The varnish came

off, leaving the pigments intact. The picture had age. "What more?" asked the judge. "Well," I replied, "this is going to be delicate." I applied the cotton and solution to the signature. In a flash the signature came off. "You see," I said, "had this signature been placed on the canvas at the time it was painted, which was about seventy years ago, it would have had the same sticking quality as the rest of the canvas. But as it is, it is a poor old painting with a newly affixed signature; that newly affixed signature is of a great artist who has been dead for some time."

There is a worthwhile moral to this anecdote. Do not put your trust exclusively in signatures. I am always suspicious of them. The true signature of an artist is his form and colors, his whole style pervading the canvas, and that is the signature that should count. There are people who do not understand this. I am reminded of a flashy *parvenue* woman of the boom days of the 1920's who had purchased an expensive but unsigned picture from a Fifty-Seventh Street dealer. She engaged an artist to affix a signature to it because she was embarrassed when her friends minimized the importance of the picture because it was unsigned!

That was silly enough but not as silly as the face-lifting I once noted had been performed on a Dutch painting of the Seventeenth Century. My wife and I had been invited to dinner at a country estate. It was a magnificent place with graceful stairways, beautiful carpets, lovely grounds and a luxurious swimming pool. But in the dining room it was my bad luck to be seated opposite a painting which the host showed off as a masterpiece by one of the Dutch Seventeenth Century artists. Seventeenth Century it was, and the signature was authentic, yet it annoyed me excessively. And no wonder! Someone, to increase the saleability of this painting, had had the features of the face altered for all the world as if a plastic surgeon and a Fifth Avenue "beautician" had gone to work on the poor woman who had once sat for the artist. The face now wore a glamorous Hollywood expres-

sion, while the figure and drapery were those belonging to the wife of a staid Dutch burgher! I am tempted to say that here was surrealism at its best—or worst, as you prefer.

My next anecdote concerns a noted professor of art at one of our universities. I had attended a lecture on Giotto, at once an impressive and an entertaining lecture, and congratulated the lecturer afterwards. An acquaintanceship followed. A few weeks later this gentleman called at my studio to show me his latest "find," which was reputed to be a primitive of the Thirteenth Century. But when I applied my magnifying glass to it, I saw that underneath the heavy coats of varnish the painting had been executed in oil. Now we know that the primitive painters worked in tempera and that oil paints were introduced in the Fourteenth Century by the Van Eyck brothers, although some dispute their claim. (According to Maximillian Toch, the well-known authority on the chemical constituency of colors, Sir Charles Eastlake, the Nineteenth Century painter, speaks in his book, *Materials for a History of Oil Painting*, of the fact that oil painting was practised in England as far back as 1239, as a trade.) Moreover, I estimated from the oil paint that this particular painting was not more than two hundred years old. The professor had been made to believe that the painting was in tempera because of the bloomed varnish. My suspicion was that his "find" was a copy of an original painting of the Thirteenth Century, beautifully executed by some Eighteenth Century painter, who was perhaps well known and who copied it to the order of an art patron.

The professor remained skeptical of my opinion, so I had to turn Sherlock Holmes. I asked his permission to demonstrate the correctness of my opinion by giving the painting the proper test. I removed a bit of varnish from the edge of the panel and moistened the pigments with a bit of cloth and water. The pigments held. Had the painting been done in tempera, the colors would have come off. I

did not enjoy disillusioning the professor, but the naked truth was there for him to see for himself.

In contrast to those I have just told, my next anecdote has a happy ending. I once needed a frame for one of my paintings which I was to hang in an exhibition, and at an obscure shop I chanced to pass I found the very frame I wished. However, there was in the frame a nondescript painting and I wanted the shopkeeper to retain it. At my studio, while separating the picture from the frame, I noticed that two fingers in the cheaply conceived portrait were painted exceptionally well in oil as compared to the rest of the picture which was in tempera. I was a little bewildered but immediately assumed I had come up against an old trick. There was a time when antique paintings were subject to heavy duties when imported to America (such duties were later lowered through the influence of the first J. P. Morgan, I believe) and to get around these heavy duties some unscrupulous purchasers would have these paintings "camouflaged" in Europe. That is, they would have a cheap painting in tempera executed over the oil. A small duty would be assessed on the cheap picture, and then the tempera covering could be safely removed. Having nothing to lose and perhaps something to gain, I hurriedly took this nondescript panel to the bathroom and with ordinary soap and water gave it a good washing. To my immense delight out came a magnificent Bronzino, a portrait of a young woman which is now reposing in a noted museum.

As an example of an extremely expensive but very profitable art course, consider the picture-buying of J. P. Morgan, the elder, whom I mentioned a moment ago. In his early life he acquired many works of art which were mistakes in building a collection. He learned from his mistakes. He schooled himself by studying them and discarding works that his disciplined taste no longer approved.

Sometimes I think it might be better to leave works of art alone, rather than have some inexperienced restorers ob-



literate the spirit and originality of the art by their personal additions and subtractions. Restoration of works of art dates back to the Byzantine period in Italian art. During the time of Cimabue, the Church was so steeped in its religious art that it would not trust its native painters with the job of restoration. It went so far as to invite artists from Greece to Florence to restore its deteriorated art. It is a great satisfaction to a true art lover to behold such enthusiasm for the preservation of art! When one sees the carelessness and utter lack of knowledge and sensitiveness in the restoration of some of our most precious works of art, one can only breathe a prayer: would that we could emulate the spirit of these early Italians.

In conclusion, I am going to give away the secret of how to tell whether a painting is a copy or not. According to Clive Bell, it is impossible to make an absolutely exact copy of an original. The differences, he says, are felt immediately, and he attributes them to something in the mind of the artist which gets into the lines and colors and spaces, and this mental something is not in the mind of his imitators.

My explanation of the telltale symptoms of a copyist is perhaps less "mystical" than the one given by Clive Bell, but there is no real disagreement. After being consulted many times on whether or not a given painting is a copy, I have come to these generalizations: First, as a rule a copyist is not a great artist. If he were, he would not be copying pictures. It therefore follows that no matter how good and meticulous he is as a copyist, when he copies an Old Master, the result will have a certain uninspired uniformity that is absent from the original. You can readily see why this should be so. Less effort is required of the copyist; he does not have to think his way creatively through the difficulties that challenged the master.

Now when it comes to these difficulties—the ears or the hands or some other part of the portrait that required all the powers of the master to execute—the copyist will falter.

He will experiment again and again, laying on pigment to get the desired likeness to the baffling part of the composition. It is these parts I examine particularly with a magnifying glass, and almost invariably I discover a heaviness of pigment just at these difficult spots. That extra thickness is the giveaway. For great artists, as a rule, do not experiment with colors. They paint with knowledge and spontaneity, "straight from the shoulder," to say it in the vernacular; the copyist limping after the spontaneous painter takes too much pains to get the likeness at the difficult places—and the magnifying glass finds the clues to the problem of telling whether the work is an original or not.

Then finally there is that sixth sense which springs from means of perception, personal development, and love of art.

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## Chapter XVIII

### THOUGHTS ON THE PICTURE BUYERS OF YESTERDAY AND TODAY

WE ALL KNOW that we must be on guard against too rosy an estimate of "the good old days." How memory and sentiment betray us when we look backward and make comparison with the present which seems so full of imperfections! Nevertheless it is a hard unassailable fact that there have been periods when taste in the arts improved and other periods when taste degenerated. What is the truth about our period?

Take the art of reading. Mr. I. A. Richards, the literary critic, has come as near as possible to making laboratory tests of the skill and discipline of present-day readers, and he has been driven to the conclusion that the art of reading has steadily declined for the last fifty or sixty years. He is bold enough to say so and backs his statement up with many cogent reasons.

How is it with the appreciation of painting? I have been thinking about the picture buyers of this generation and the last, trying to check on my impressions and trying to squeeze all sentimentality out of my conclusion. I have been compelled in the end to accept a conclusion that in the field of art parallels Richards' conclusion in the field of literature. I firmly believe that there were more genuinely sincere picture buyers before the First World War than in the following "boom" period.

Let us go back in memory to the pre-1914 days. It was customary then for the picture buyer to visit his favorite galleries on his leisure days and lose himself in an atmos-

phere of complete forgetfulness of the outside world. The high-pressure sales methods that characterized the 1920's were then seldom used by the art dealer. The collector would actually buy a work of art on his own initiative. He looked at it with his own eyes, not through the eyes of others. He didn't buy it through his ears, so to speak, because of what he heard others say about it.

This pre-1914 collector was not the "intellectual" collector we know today, but an emotional lover of art. If he loved to hang on his walls the genre paintings of Vibert, Knaus or our own J. G. Brown, he had the courage of his love; he selected them on his own initiative and these paintings were as a rule genuine and pure even if not by the greatest of masters. If he bought an Old Master, he would actually feel like kneeling in reverence before it. There were no Botticellis then, springing up in great numbers like mushrooms, to confer "atmosphere" to the Cinque Cento Palazzo furnishings of Park Avenue penthouses turned out by interior decorators.

The well-meaning collector of today is a somewhat puzzled person. With the vogue of the Anthro-po-Eccentric painters and with the propaganda of the *Ecole de Paris* buzzing in his ears, he is hesitant and confused. Seeing large sums paid by important persons, people of education and wealth, for the works of the Eccentrics, he is obliged to conjecture that there must be esthetic worth in these moderns; yet he cannot make up his mind to live with them. At the same time he does not become a patron of the rational contemporary painters because he fears that his "intellectual" friends will look down on him for exhibiting a retrogressive taste. So our collector who would have enjoyed building his personal collection a generation ago now is forced to mark time.

One fact responsible for the change in picture buying from the First World War to the Second World War has been the rise in importance of the interior decorator. To

avoid any misunderstanding of my subsequent remarks about interior decorators, let me say at once that interior decorators are true artists in their own field. Their medium is an important one, and some decorators have quite remarkable talent. We can all be grateful for the gracefulness they have added to living. But having paid this tribute, I must now object to the dictation that interior decorators have often exercised over the picture buyer. This dictation has its origin in the way the decorator regards his own medium. He is much more concerned with the whole room as a picture than he is with the individual meaning of the painting hung in the room. I mean that he treats paintings as a means to his end, not as ends in themselves.

To explain further: it is the relation of the painting to other objects in the space he is decorating that most interests the interior decorator. It is therefore not the quality of the painting that he considers so much as it is the blending of its color with the room, the size of it, the type of frame that it has. If to complete his arrangement he feels the need for a mirror or a piece of damask or a scrawl in the *moderne* manner, then it's out with even a Rembrandt or a Boucher to give scope to his plans.

The truth is that very few interior decorators are connoisseurs of paintings, and the wholesale banishment of good works of art by them is, to use a word that is not too strong, criminal. Often something like this happened in the "boom" days when orthodox period interiors were the rage: there being a dearth of genuine old paintings to supply the demand, the market soon filled up with spurious imitations. Overpainted "ancestors" beautified to comply with present day standards—Italian noblemen and English lords—appeared on many walls in homes of their "descendants," calling to mind Oscar Wilde's cutting epigram about "casting artificial pearls before real swine." So many people boasted of having Gainsboroughs and Nattiers that one had to suppose that either these artists had lived a thousand years of

highly prolific production or else had had more arms than a centipede has legs.

The interior decorator cannot be exonerated for this debauchery of taste by the spurious, for when his mood demanded pictures during the "period" craze, he did his best to boom the sale of antique paintings and the market became overrun with copies palmed off as originals. Quite soon buyers began to ask questions and manifest skepticism; this put the dealer on the spot, to use the vernacular, and soon a new kind of specialist was invented, the "art expert." To take out insurance on their own reputations, the dealers brought in the "expert" to corroborate the bona fide character of the paintings they were selling to the patrons. At the time the dealers did not realize that they were creating a Frankenstein monster that would eventually weaken their own initiative and responsibility. The "art expert" was certainly convenient since another dealer's "knock"—the great fear of the art trade—often could not overthrow the "art expert's" opinion. Sometimes for as small a fee as twenty-five dollars a dealer could transfer his responsibility for the honesty and authenticity of a picture to the "expert." Many buyers came to feel that they did not need the word of a casual picture dealer when they could get an erudite opinion from an "expert" who had published an expensive book and displayed a great historical knowledge of art.

It is true that frequently an "art expert's" certificate has temporary value. However, many a time the "expert" has to change his opinions because of new findings in his researches, and thus it comes about that many a person owning a painting with a certificate placing it in an important category has seen his "masterpiece" demoted to the status of a school painting or even of a copy.

The public does not know but is learning that it is the dealer who is as a rule the real art expert. He has to have practical knowledge and to make intuitive observations of technical details; he is sobered by his cash investment and by

having burned his fingers in auction rooms; he has constant contact with pictures. He is never fearful of his clientele, but he is worried over his competitors. This makes him fearful of exhibiting a dubious picture in his window; no matter how enticing it may be to the public, he is afraid of the opinion of other dealers about it. An "expert" then has no special appeal to a dealer other than as an aid in selling. Thus it comes about that now many independent dealers dispense with art opinions from "specialists" altogether. They have wisely decided to sell on their own word or not at all. As an aside to persons desiring to own paintings, I will offer the advice that they should patronize a reputable dealer, who is not necessarily the biggest, and look on him somewhat as one looks upon an advising physician, not forgetting that physicians also make mistakes now and then.

In a moment I shall return to the interior decorators who got us off on this dealer-"art expert" track, but it is worthwhile pursuing our present line of thought a little further. People lacking art knowledge but nevertheless desiring to own works of art should never attempt purchases at auctions, although connoisseurs have frequently done well at them. The reason is that no auction room, no matter how responsible, ever holds itself liable for the authenticity of a painting, or any other work of art. This is usually explained in the foreword to the sale catalogue. Therefore, unless one is accompanied to an auction by an experienced and thoroughly knowledgeable person in the field of art, or unless one is a connoisseur oneself, beware. You may return home with something that no one would accept as a gift. Many connoisseurs, including myself, have had very fortunate experiences at auctions when for a negligible amount of money, we have received returns of small fortunes. But these cases are rare.

It is best to patronize the responsible art dealer even if sometimes you pay more for a painting than you would at an auction. At leisure select a work of art which not only

will give you great pleasure indefinitely but which the dealer will back up for authenticity. The art dealer will in most cases permit the prospective buyer to live with the picture before the latter makes his final decision. This is a great advantage over buying something in the excitement of bidding at an auction where a painting once bought cannot be returned.

By the way, art galleries are most generous business institutions. At the expense of private enterprise, one can receive a liberal art education strolling up and down Fifty-Seventh Street and adjoining streets in Manhattan. Yes, art dealers have been called fakers and racketeers, and far be it from me to say they will not need much forgiveness in the next world (as what business man will not?), but all the same they have done more to open the portals of beauty to the public than any other class of people. As esthetic missionaries they have softened hearts, removed the prickly rind from hardened materialists, and inspired many plutocrats, who otherwise would be remembered for their ruthlessness, to erect monumental collections to perpetuate their memory.

And now back to some of the sins of the interior decorator, and here I shall get down to cases. For instance, I recall an Oklahoma farmer who one morning discovered oil in his backyard. In no time at all an Eastern decorator was exploiting this new potential multi-millionaire. Although the farmer's wife had been used to the open spaces and an almost Spartan simplicity in her life, she was soon ensconced in a Louis XV boudoir with fussy laces and ruffles and on the walls and ceilings were fake Nattiers and Boucher cherubs. Her devoted spouse was forcibly separated from her and stuck away in an old Spanish chamber. The change in environment was too much for the farmer's wife and she actually became mentally ill.

Then there is the case of a timid little clothing manufacturer. He had amassed a fortune from a war contract



and was inveigled by a decorator into decorating his "library" with a set of sporting paintings by the English painter, Herring. This little man who was actually afraid of a horse was surrounded by pictures of horses, horses, horses, when in the relaxation of his non-business hours he was attempting to read his evening newspaper. Incidentally, his colored servant, who had observed the nameplate of Herring on the pictures, confided to the cook that "they calls 'em herrings but to me they's just horses." He should have met the attendant at a gallery which was showing an exhibition of portraiture of famous Americans I was attending. I overheard this attendant say to another, as he pointed to a fine Duplessis portrait of Benjamin Franklin: "This is a picture of an old-time decorator because he signed the Decoration of Independence."

Well, there has been in recent years a sort of "Decoration of Independence." Formerly buyers were interested in the artist, but under the influence of the decorator their interest has shifted first and foremost to the size, frame and color of the painting so that the picture could be tied up with the focal interior. The name of the artist or his unique message was a matter of only secondary consideration to the decorator celebrating his independence.

I remember a charming lady of great wealth whose husband was very proud of a choice Corot he had purchased at the turn of this century. When the "period" style of decoration came in, this lady summoned an expensive interior decorator to transform her apartment into the interior of an Eighteenth Century English Manor House. When I visited her in her new surroundings I was saddened by the absence of the fine Corot and asked concerning its whereabouts. The lady replied that her decorator simply could not "see" this Nineteenth Century canvas in an orthodox Eighteenth Century drawing room. Some years later this lady had a change of mind and again transformed her apartment, this time "à la style moderne." Again the Corot was missing. To my

question she replied: "How can a Barbizon painting stand up with a Matisse!"

Having broken our bondage to the "period" style, we are now sunk in bondage to "modernism." It is equally despotic. "No Gainsborough will ever cross the threshold of my modern fortress," a young person of my acquaintance has declared. Yet this very same person is now balancing his "modern" masters with the early American "Primitives," those utterly unskilled artists who were the "photographers" of pre-camera days who lived at the time when Benjamin West, Gilbert Stuart and Copley were already accomplished artists in this country before their departure for England. (See Figures 21 and 22.)

Holger Cahill in his explanatory preface to *American Folk Art*, published by the Museum of Modern Art, states that these "primitive" paintings have a quality which gives them "a certain kinship with modern art." Have we made no progress in our art since that time? Why should our present-day art assume the immaturity, the naivete, and the childishness of these unskilled painters? Why are we not equally tolerant with some of the simple versifiers of those times? Would a lover of poetry, of Whitman, of Poe, of Dickinson, see anything but a childish prattle or a bit of quaint amusement in them?

These "primitive" painters are spoken of as having a pure simple style. Well, simplicity is a relative term. A drawing by Leonardo which may appear so simple to the eye is actually the product of a great talent, and even his followers like Gianpietrino, Da Sesto, d'Oggionno, who tried to imitate him, could not master the quality of this simplicity. (See Figure 23.) The delicacy of line and curvature eluded them. Great art like great music is no simple matter. It is profound and sometimes highly complicated. Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Turner, or Bach, Wagner or Beethoven are no exponents of simplicity. The simple line or the melody of

a great master that has stirred the world may carry with it an immense ideology.

As I write, the art galleries along Fifty-Seventh Street and vicinity in New York are surfeited with exhibitions of sculpture and painting ("modern") combined with the arts of other civilizations. These exhibitions purport to show similarities between the objects exhibited. For instance, there is a combination of an African mask with a figure piece of Modigliani; another French *moderne* is shown with an Alaskan totem pole, and a certain art critic besought the gallery goers to note the similarity of a Matisse to a bit of Oriental art. Here is an out-and-out confession by graphic examples that these "modern" artists are nothing else but poor imitators of their predecessors. Another proposed exhibition for some war charity is of Byzantine and medieval art combined with the French "moderns" and interspersed with African Benin and American Primitives. What a circus—and what press agentry it gets!

The naivete and simplicity which our Anthro-po-Eccentric artists and critics so admire in the African and Primitive Americans (not Indian) were no simple matters to their creators. To them their work was the highest expression of their efforts and character. The same can be said for the Italian primitive painters but of course in a superior context of civilization. Would not those painters have rejoiced over the technical endowment of the Renaissance? But our Eccentrics, having the inherited or acquired taste for the crude and distorted, will naturally and with gratification put emphasis upon such arts. I wonder what Fra Angelico, or his precursor Giotto, were they able to wander about the aforementioned galleries on Fifty-Seventh Street, would have said about their present-day company forced upon them by our Anthro-po-Eccentrics.

These are some of the sins of decorators that cross my mind. Now for an example of a decorator's tact and good sense. A gentleman whom I had known for many years had

made a collection of Nineteenth Century genre pictures. He liked the jollity of well-fed abbots, Tyrolean innkeepers, and the festivities of tipplers. After the end of the First World War, his wife engaged a stylish interior decorator. My friend was saddened and dismayed. He did not oppose the banishment of the bric-a-brac he and his wife had accumulated, including some ostentatious mementos of the Buffalo Exposition and the St. Louis Fair, but he was firmly resolved not to give up his pictures for anybody. Happily the decorator did not have a single-track mind. By changing some of the frames of the pictures, she wove these sentimental pictures into a very attractive scheme consisting of Old English Furniture, Oriental porcelains and fabrics. The setting was not only warming but was an example of subordinating the "decorator's touch" to the patron's personality. I am glad to record that some decorators have been veritable angels in the home, making up for the provocation given by others who have not pried sufficiently into the minds and sensibilities of their clients to discover what surroundings would best suit the psychological character of the client.

My general charge has been that while decorators know the "effect" of a painting in relation to the general scheme they have in mind, they see the painting too exclusively as a central object or an accessory in the midst of other things. A means, not an end, as I said earlier. I have also noted in this essay that the zeal of the decorators for "authenticity" and "atmosphere" in their settings unfortunately stimulated a false desire for art; many people were quite satisfied to have a bogus Gilbert Stuart or a Renoir. But I have great hopes of a happier relationship between painter and decorator when I recall that in some instances a decorator has refined the taste of his client in painting and has induced him to replace out-and-out fake paintings with less expensive but real paintings. Sometimes these replacements have been works by contemporary artists, which is most refreshing. To see hanging in a decorated apartment a well-painted

picture by even an obscure living painter is a revivifying experience. May the tribe of tactful, intelligent interior decorators increase!

As I was finishing this essay, time played one of its jokes. During the lifetime of Cézanne, Bouguereau was the darling of French art and his paintings brought big prices from collectors and museums. How Cézanne despised him and how jealous he was of Bouguereau's popularity! When M. Vollard placed Cézanne firmly in the saddle, Bouguereau's stock took a steep dip. Now, all of a sudden, we are startled to find the firm of Durand-Ruel, the citadel of impressionistic art, the sponsors and pioneers of impressionism, post-impressionism and expressionism, heralding to the world the news that they have discovered in a storage house an important Bouguereau which had once adorned the wall of a barroom in a famous New York cafe at the turn of the century. Messrs. Durand-Ruel have enshrined the painting, and at the very moment I pen these words it is hanging in their *sanctum sanctorum* for the benefit of war relief with the welcome sign out for all to come and see this wonderful masterpiece. How the spirit of Cézanne must quake and curse to have the despised Bouguereau share the same roof with him! What a jest Father Time can make! And here is an example of how an important gallery can sway the taste of the public. I shall not be surprised if this reaction should swing the pendulum toward Bouguereau again, carrying academicism with it to its former height. Here, once again, is the functioning of time.

## Chapter XIX

### DIP-READING IN THE ART CRITICS

ONE OF THE GREATEST pleasures is the practice known as dip-reading. It can, of course, be done with new books, diaries or essays, but I think the practice works best with books that one has already read and assimilated. Instead of devoting an entire evening to one author, one may lay on the table four or five books by as many authors and dipping into all of them treat oneself to discourse with a variety of minds all in one evening. It is like having several callers conversing on topics that interest one instead of carrying on a discussion with one person subject to all the limitations of his particular temperament.

This evening I am writing after being called on, so to speak, by five writers on art. They were the art historian Elie Faure, the critic and art expert Osvald Siren, the historian of art criticism Lionello Venturi, the English critic Roger Fry, and the Italian philosopher and esthetician Benedetto Croce, and the talk fell mostly upon the Old Masters. Now that they have gone—I mean now that I have shut their books after reflecting on certain passages in them—I find myself indulging in the pleasures of dissent. They said a number of things I do not agree with, as well as some things in which I concur, and if I now state my points of dissent, I shall not interrupt them with contradictions but only get things straight in my own mind and, I hope, in my readers' minds, too.

Faure, for example, made a statement that I consider very debatable. He was talking about Raphael and the arabesque. He attributed the arabesque to a union of forms scattered by the break-up of Catholicism. Spiritual unity,

he maintained, had been destroyed in the human heart by human knowledge, and now through the arabesque, art was regaining a spiritual unity. Well, that is a generalization, and like all generalizations it impels one to think of exceptions and qualifications. True, Catholicism for centuries conduced to spiritual unity in art, but was it solely responsible?

I must not be understood as denigrating the greatness of the art produced under the Catholic Church in the medieval period. The devout purity of Fra Angelico and other primitive painters incontestably can be traced to their being inspired by Catholic faith. And during the Renaissance the painters of that era still warmed their imaginations with the spirit of the Catholic Church. They were deviating from the churchly model and being fired with new concepts; their religious inspiration was less strong than that of their predecessors, but all the same they owed much to Catholicism. Now for some questioning of Faure's too general statement.

What, for instance, of Dürer? Dürer was a product of the Reformation in Germany; he was actually a friend of the humanist Erasmus and of Luther. Then there was Holbein. He was Erasmus' friend and painted him. Both Dürer and Holbein were near contemporaries of Raphael and Leonardo. I might also say, what about Rembrandt? He belonged to the Dutch Church, he wasn't a Catholic. The same is true of Vermeer. What of Gainsborough and Turner? Church of England, of course. Faure's statement was persuasive when he made it; the lyrical power of his writing sweeps the reader along. But is it true even of Catholic painters? It will be granted that Rubens, Poussin and David are among the great Catholic painters, yet surely much of their inspiration came from the paganism of the Greeks. And in the last analysis, the arabesque that Raphael used as a means of unification of the Catholic religion, according to Faure, was nothing else but a symbol the painter borrowed from the non-Catholics, from, that is, the Arabs

and Moors, who, like the Hebrews, frowned upon image-worship such as the Catholic Church embraced.

Faure also touched upon the Venetian painters whom I particularly admire. Their colors have deteriorated, but in their day they were the masters of color. More skilfully and brilliantly than the painters of our time, they handled color with exquisite tact, as Bernhard Berenson so ably points out. With them coloring never seems an after-thought. It was seldom cold and rarely too warm. The eye can be trained to allow for the darkening of their colors by time and for unsuccessful attempts at restoration. What is striking is the fact that the colors of the Venetians work upon the spectator's moods like music, evoking thoughts and memories in much the same way that a work by a great composer affects one. The Church, by the way, from the first took account of the influence of color as well as music upon the emotions.

Faure led me to reflect upon the different environments of the Old Masters. Religion was, of course, the great ideal force of the medieval period, and when it lessened, it is noticeable that the great painters took to portraiture. There was no photography of that time, and they found themselves kept very busy and incidentally paid handsomely by the nobles and the rich. To have a king or prince for a patron was the lot of a number of great painters, for instance, Raphael, Velasquez, Van Dyck, Holbein, and Rubens. Despite the vogue of portraiture, these artists were prolific in other types of painting and exercised their imaginations in a religious direction. Had they lived in our day, the direction of their imagination and their art would of course have been somewhat different.

But I must not muse entirely on thoughts evoked by Faure, for Osvald Siren was equally provocative. Speaking of Leonardo, Siren observed: "In his case it is not a question of forms defined by synthetic simplification of line and planes. The figure is enveloped in an atmosphere of sub-



dued luminosity in which the contours are dissolved but in which the full bodily form is well perceived. The features are not defined by sharp lines but are modelled in varying tones that vibrate with subdued light. All the planes are evident; and yet to the eye of the spectator they all blend to produce perfect unity."

I wish to add a word about Leonardo's tones. Appropriately to his time, the subject matter of Leonardo's portraits is intensely interesting and stirs the imagination, but it is in his color-tones of *chiaroscuro*, vibrating in perfect unity and singing out melodies, that Leonardo will always be the master and his imitative pupils will always play second fiddle to his vast orchestrations of pigmentary and plastic tones.

To return to Siren: he quite rightly said that we must not understand the naturalism of the Renaissance in the modern sense of the word and he quoted that splendid saying of Delacroix: "It is far more important for the artist to approach more nearly to the ideal he bears within and which is his, than to grasp the fleeting ideal offered by Nature." Yes, I thoroughly agree with Delacroix; it is far more important to paint the ideal emanating from one's soul than an elusive expression of Nature.

Here is a point at which I disagree with Siren. He quoted Alberti's famous statement about Narcissus being the true discoverer of painting and added this: "Alberti combines interest in nature with the worship of beauty. The crystal-clear mirror reflects the pure features of Narcissus, but at the same time the youth is changed, while he gazes, into a flower that in its beauty and fragrance symbolizes his soul." And Siren went on to recall that Leonardo said that a good painter must not only reproduce the outer man but also the motions of his soul.

May I enter here a claim for music, the greatest of all the arts, as an inspiration to the painter? Perhaps music was not greatly appreciated in Alberti's time, because it was not developed to the degree of today. At any rate, I would

say that Alberti gives a little too much credit to Narcissus, beautiful as is his fancy about the discovery of painting.

But as a courteous host I must now give some attention to my guest Venturi. He too dwelt on Leonardo, from whom he quoted these dicta: "Painting is not only a science, it is even a divinity, because it transforms the painter's mind into something similar to the mind of God. Science considers the quantity whilst art considers the quality of things. Painting is the origin of all arts and crafts, it is also the source of science." Venturi's comment is that this is Neo-Platonism but with a new accent because the painter, who is almost God, is opposed to the scientist who is simply man.

Today I think it is true that science has come to accept quality as well as quantity. For art, quality is the indispensable, the *sine qua non*. Leonardo da Vinci, it is true, used his drawing and his art in order to know anatomy, to master perspective, and to prepare himself for all the mechanical sciences of his time. Yet the proposition that the primary truth of art is the proper preparation for the truth of science may still be considered debatable. Nevertheless, if the artist is loyal to his art notwithstanding that art by itself may be an-illusion, this loyalty is of great help in undertaking scientific research. It is only that I think the proposition of Leonardo must not be held quite as dogmatically as Venturi seems to maintain it.

Roger Fry during my evening of dip-reading talked about Giotto and Raphael's *Transfiguration*. (See Figure 24.) There is a touch of the eccentric as defined in my opening essay in Fry, and he makes much of placing himself sympathetically and imaginatively in other environments of the past. According to him, Raphael's *Transfiguration* one hundred years ago was the most admired picture, perhaps, in the world, and twenty or so years ago it was one of the most neglected. But who, I am compelled to ask, was neglecting it twenty years ago? There are fluctuations in taste as well as in art viewed as a commodity. The taste of

the eccentrics ran against Raphael for a while, but the fact of Raphael's greatness was unaltered. The *Transfiguration* is still considered a very great work of art despite these minor fluctuations of taste, just as it was a century ago.

After hearing Fry's opinion of Giotto, I turned to Croce on the same artist and pondered on his statement that "some, for instance, talk of the infancy of Italian art in Giotto and of its maturity in Raphael or in Titian; as though Giotto were not complete and absolutely perfect, granted the material of feeling with which his mind was furnished." Croce was making his familiar point that where the matter is not the same, a progressive cycle does not exist.

I do not so much dissent from Croce's point as corroborate it by my own art experience. The savage, of course, coming in contact with our civilization, would regard its esthetic pursuits as strange and peculiar—just as we feel that way about the arts of the savage. But we are able to enter into the savage's mind and see how much the artistic savage is part and parcel of his way of life and his society. Skipping to Giotto and Raphael, each was the summit of his time, and each generation has its acme of development. One could go so far as to say that relatively speaking the art of a very talented child is as great in its way as the mature art of the later years when the child has become an adult painter. Giotto expressed himself in an abstract religious way; his style is seen to marvelous advantage in *St. Francis with Poverty*. Raphael could not have painted in that style. Why? For the same reason that a mature person cannot physically express himself in the loveliness of childhood. As Croce said, "How then can a comparison be made where there is no comparative term?"

I am glad that this little spell of dip-reading ended on a note of agreement. That is the way a social evening with people who take the arts with seriousness and who differ on many points should end—in pleasant agreement on some point held in common.

## Chapter XX

### RANDOM THOUGHTS ON ART

ONE OF THE INFLATED critical reputations of our time is that of Elie Faure, the writer on art. Faure uses an excited style, but very often when the excitement has been removed from his content, we find that he has only stated a platitude, or perhaps I should say, mis-stated a platitude. For example, he argues that history repeats itself. Of course, history repeats itself, but Faure manages to twist the repetitions he cites. He derives Greek art in part from Phoenician, but fails to note that the Phoenicians did not discover art, as the ancients believed. In truth, Phoenician art had no originality and little merit; it was a borrowed art, borrowed in particular from the Egyptians. Some Phoenician sculpture clearly shows borrowing from the Egyptians and the Babylonians.

The Italians developed the Byzantine art into the Renaissance, and the spirit of medieval art was the inspiration from which the Pre-Raphaelites hundreds of years later created their concept. I sometimes think we may well see the ancient Egyptian art blossom again in some great development of the future. Just as Verdi did with the opera *Aida* or Shakespeare did with *Antony and Cleopatra*, so some artist may abstract the spirit of ancient Egyptian art and base a new concept on it. During Napoleon's campaign in Egypt, there was a revival of Egyptian styles in furniture, silverware and ceramics. True, this revival did not stem from great creative ideas but the future may, as I have said, hold a really great renewal of the impulses of ancient Egyptian art. Faure, however, likes to sweep along with his lyrical generalities and to neglect qualifying statements about history repeating itself such as I have just made.

A much heavier reputation than Faure's is that of Benedetto Croce's. In some ways he is a corrective of the exclusive stress that writers like Wilenski and Bell put upon catch-phrases like "architectural form" or "significant form." Croce notes that style is sometimes synonymous with expression. Dr. Max J. Friedlander, whom I quote elsewhere in this book, comes to my mind as I read Croce; Friedlander has a very felicitous and simple way of putting things. He says, for example, "Color and form don't bear to one another the relation of two qualities, but rather they are like the quality and quantity of a substance. Our eyes take in color alone. That which we call form is the extension of color, its location in the plane of vision." That is neatly put.

I agree with Croce in rejecting a literal idea of imitating Nature, but at the same time I dissent from the notion that the artist can improve on Nature. Can a human being improve a sunset? But a creative artist is one who can create out of his imagination. What did Turner do? He used Nature as a stepping stone, so to speak, to reach his imaginative concepts.

Where Croce is especially rhapsodic is on art and science which "are different and yet linked together. . . . Every scientific work is also a work of art." But at this point we must remember that there are fashions in science. What was scientific a few generations ago is regarded as unscientific now. Art too changes and evolves, and because of this fluidity I think we should take with a grain of salt such rhapsodic thinking as Croce's on science and art.

Croce rebukes Plato and claims that art does not belong to Nature but adds beauty where it is wanting in Nature. I touched on the edge of this thought just above; here I can only repeat what I have said several times in other essays: we humans are subject to Nature and cannot improve upon that which controls us. No matter how great our skill with

words or pigments, we are very limited verbally in describing Nature.

In passing, I should like to add a note to what Croce says about Kant who maintained that art is not pure beauty but is "adherent beauty," meaning that it attaches itself to a concept. Art may not be pure beauty, but it might be the most beautiful thing to some viewer who sees in it a reflection of his own imaginative qualities. Indeed, art though not beautiful may still be very impressive to certain minds when it has certain characteristics that surpass surface beauty. The folk saying is that "beauty is only skin deep." The most beautiful woman, if she has a coarse voice and a dull mind, can cause a sensitive person to turn from her beauty in disgust. Art needs more than a superficial beauty.

A poet has said the last word on this subject:

*We receive but what we give . . . .  
From the soul itself must issue forth  
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud  
Enveloping the earth.*

And now I must take up briefly a great writer with strong views on art whom no one can overlook in any discussion of the meaning and value of art. I refer of course to Tolstoi and his book, *What Is Art?*, in which he speaks of the repudiation of art by Plato, the Hebrew prophets, the ancient Christians and the strict Mohammedans and Buddhists. I must except then those concentric painters of lofty ideologies from this judgment. So long as art presents such a concentric vision, the world will look up to art and worship it. But when we turn from this concentricity and follow the eccentrics, we shall be abandoned and rightly so by idealists like Plato. Posterity will be our judge and will find our present civilization lacking because it finds our art eccentric, for do we not ourselves judge past civilizations by their arts? It is quite possible that some future historian may even

write us down as barbarians and see the period between the First World War and the Second as a period of disintegration during which we embraced the African gods of Benin.

The truth about Tolstoi, as any knowing person who reads his account of his indignation at the Paris exhibition in 1894 of the Impressionists and Neo-Impressionists realizes, is that he was a very poor critic of music and art while being at the same time a great philosopher, psychologist and novelist.

In my essay on the Bloomsbury critics, Bell and Fry, I stated my agreement with Fry on the subject of Tolstoi. Through the lessons of experience and the growth of character, the imaginative life comes finally to reflect the highest aspirations and deepest aversions of which human nature is capable. What Tolstoi finally says is that art is a great matter. It is not just pleasure or a solace or an amusement. Tolstoi thinks of art as an organ of life, which transmutes man's reasonable perceptions into feeling. He contends that consciousness of the brotherhood of man is the common religious perception of men today, and that art has the task of transforming this perception into feeling, while science should apply this perception to life.

From Tolstoi let me pass now, since this is a rambling essay, to Osvald Siren and some notes I have made on his *Essentials in Art*.

Siren, as a matter of fact, is a very good corrective to Wilenski and other champions of eccentricity. I fully agree with him that an artist should express himself emotionally and spiritually. That is what the romanticists had in mind, those romanticists Wilenski tilts against. Siren puts it very cogently when he affirms that "when we come to physical movement we readily perceive it without any tuning of the instrument because we are organically attuned to the rhythmic vibrations of the physical world." This makes it probable that he would differ with Wilenski about the "mechanical eye" which is nothing but the natural eye. Also we may

agree with Siren, quoting Professor Taki of Tokio University, that any representative painting or drawing or symbol of our past ages, even going as far back as the glacial, bronze or other ancient periods and continuing right up to the present, constitutes a key to the type of civilization from which it came.

We must furthermore give thanks to Siren for quoting Leone Battista Alberti, a great architect of the fifteenth century. Alberti gives the perfect answer to Wilenski: "Genius brings forth form. Nature produces the material. For the former is needed concentration and creative power, for the latter selection and adaptation; and I have also thought that neither the one nor the other is sufficient in itself without the works of an experienced artist who knows how to bring form and material into harmony. . . . Everything that is produced by Nature has its measure in the law of harmony. Nature strives not otherwise than that its products may be perfect. But that condition cannot be attained, if harmony is lacking, for then the highest active consonance of all the parts vanishes."

In this essay of side-glances at a number of writers of art, one should certainly take a side-glance at Venturi, who notes that color may be rationalized and that Aristotle wrote a treatise on color distinguishing three elements: light, the matter through which light passes, and the local color from which the light is reflected. But in his remarks on Ruskin I do not think Venturi quite catches the point. Ruskin adored Nature. He considered Nature the artists' greatest source, but it was a source not for imitation but a source for extracting the spirit of things. No artist, as I often say, can improve upon Nature. Gilding the lily is a futile undertaking. Turner, whom Ruskin championed, shows us how to abstract from Nature without imitating her. His symphonies of color dominated his landscapes and seascapes, and Ruskin worshiped him and helped to enshrine him in the hearts of all true art-lovers.



Straight thinking on this matter of imitation of Nature and on distortions is not as common as one could wish, and in this among others Wilenski errs. Take the primitive Italian painters. Wilenski would have it that they purposely distorted their art; he argues that these painters planned to make their figures more saintly by de-humanizing them. The true reason is also the more plausible one. These painters clung to the stilted Byzantine style but they were making an effort to create their own expression. But their knowledge of anatomical structure and perspective was limited. We can therefore call their distortions sincere efforts to depart from the Byzantine style; they were painting the best they knew how. They constituted a stream which was swelling and developing its mighty power, gathering to burst on the world as the Renaissance.

My last side-glance will be at Alfred H. Barr's book, *Cubism and Abstract Art*, published in 1936, a veritable handbook of eccentricity. Barr's book is really a catalogue of an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art and is more of an elucidation of the artists' ideas than a putting forward of Barr's own opinions. Barr ponders on the queer titles which men like Arp and Picasso have given to their near-abstractions. They will call a near-abstraction a "Head" or a "Still life," and the layman will wonder why they don't go the whole way as does Kandinsky and simply call them a "Composition" or an "Improvisation." With this I agree, but if these titles are inconsistent, then what were the real meanings of these artists? Barr offers a tenuous explanation for the titles that Arp and Picasso used, but I think we are entitled to a smile; why were these paintings exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art and reproduced in Barr's book without reasonable explanation? Mr. Barr gives the impression of being confused and uncomprehending himself.

Frequently Barr, in stating the artist's point of view, seems to impress upon the reader that geometry is art. It isn't. Professor McMahon has said that Plato disliked art

but appreciated the esthetics of geometry. But Plato is no arbiter of art, and geometrical delineations alone cannot be accepted as art according to past standards. Barr analyzes the Suprematist painting of Malevich; we need only to comment that while geometrical lines may add up to art, by themselves they never have the true savor of art. This comment will also dispose of Barr's praise of Bracque and Picasso when he writes about the beginnings of Cubism, about 1906.

Sometimes we can play Barr off against Wilenski. For example, Barr talks about the preference of Bracque and Picasso around 1909 for painting in sober grays, greens and browns. The humor here is to remember that Wilenski charged Corot with using grays in imitation of photography but says nothing about photographic grays when he comes to Picasso and Bracque.

But it is what Barr has to say about abstract art and subject matter that will serve to bring the random thoughts of this essay to a head and to a final generalization. The Cubists, according to Barr, had little conscious interest in subject matter, whereas the Futurists considered subject matter to have real importance. The Dadaists had no prejudice against subject matter while the Surrealists, being Freudian, found symbolic significances in even squares and circles. The interplay of the machine age and abstractions was particularly noticeable in Léger's painting between 1918 and 1920.

Here I give a series of dates, according to Barr:

- 1874. First Impressionist Exhibition, Paris.
- 1885. Neo-Impressionism: Seurat at work on the *Grande-Jatte*.
- 1888. Synthetism. Gauguin at Pont-Aven: Van Gogh goes to Provence.
- 1905. Matisse the leader of the Fauve Group at the Autumn Salon.

There is the cycle from Impressionism to Fauvism. All these schools of art have had their fling and some still retain their strength, others are weakening, while still others are near their last gasp. So it is also with the Futurists and the other schools Barr enumerates that are more recent.

The Futurists might have interested the mechanically minded but not the esthetically minded who feed on lofty ideals rather than machinery. The one generalization about art that holds firm and unshakable is this: schools come and go but time will tell the ultimate worth of the paintings that come out of them.

People who understand the judgment of time grow serene and tolerant. They know that brute force never solves any question of the mind or the spirit. They are not put out by the fact that others disagree with them; that is their sacred privilege. In the long run time has the final say.

Part VI

THE AFFIRMATIONS OF COLOR-MUSIC



## Chapter XXI

### WHAT COLOR-MUSIC IS

*Les sons ne produisent jamais autant d'effet  
que lorsqu'ils éveillent l'impression de  
couleurs.*—Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

THE ART CLOSEST to my heart is Color-Music Expressionism in painting, and for a long time I have wished to give the art public a somewhat more detailed explanation of it than that which has appeared in concise form on my exhibition catalogues. My theory has been understood by some, misunderstood by others. One of my most ardent supporters was the late William Harper Davis, physicist and psychologist, whom I met many years ago at the Art Alliance in Philadelphia where I had been invited for an exhibition of my work. Prompted by my work, Professor Davis wrote a complete and profound exposition of my Color-Music paintings, treating them not alone from the esthetic point of view but from the scientific and psychological points of view as well. Unfortunately this most complete analysis of Color-Music theory has not yet been published, though I hope to make arrangements towards that end whenever war conditions relax and art interests find a favorable environment again. Until Professor Davis' treatise can be published, I hope that this brief sketch of the theory will be of use to the increasing number who inquire about Color-Music.

In our time I may fairly claim to be the originator of the school of Color-Music Expressionism in painting. Since 1911, and even earlier, I have experimented with this synæsthetic expression. How I came to do so, I can only explain by saying that I was endowed with an inherent perception.

My experimentation I have offered to the world to accept or reject. To those in sympathy with my theory, I have suggested that it is a stepping stone or a bridge to be improved upon and to lead perhaps to such a fruition of the arts as Wagner dreamed of.

To explain what Color-Music is in painting, it is well first to clear away misconceptions and state what it is not. It is not those paintings that some people speak of as musical interpretations and which are not musical interpretations. Such paintings are usually genre or programmatic type paintings which depict the title or the story of the piece of music—be it song, symphony or opera. The reader has probably seen such paintings: a scene from *Faust* representing Mephisto and Marguerite, or a scene showing a brooding Beethoven walking in the moonlight intended to suggest the title of his famous sonata, or a picture of Wagner in a pensive mood having visions of *Tannhäuser* or *Parsifal*. Such paintings have nothing to do with Color-Music and should be put out of mind, although there have been great artists who have been inspired by great music. But the works thus inspired have been remarkable only as art, not as Color-Music, which is a different story.

Another type of painting which has erroneously been classified as Color-Music is composed of abstract formations of cubes, circles and other geometrical shapes. The false idea has been spread that these abstract paintings were a "scientific" representation of sound or music. This is erroneous because these abstractions as well as their colors are static, whereas music is fugitive, like spoken words, and has a vibrational quality. But of this more will be said later on.

Then there have been painters who have possessed musical qualities in their art, but they have not expressed music directly. They may have expressed such musical qualities as rhythm and tone without knowing it. I am thinking of such artists as Turner, Monticelli, Monet and Renoir. It is a question sometimes if such painters were not far removed

from appreciating the spirit of music; or on the other hand they might have been endowed with the spirituality of music. In a similar way Wagner might be called a painter, although he was not an artist in the sense a painter means. The point is that the painters I have indicated did not aim to express music directly.

We should now be able to take up the theory of Color-Music which many people have dismissed, some with skepticism, others with ridicule and others with anger. Mostly Color-Music has been dismissed by people unattuned to the new idea, who cling to the old idea of a single art. Running the gantlet of disparagement is the fate of all new schools. The greatest theories, whether in art or science—one might recall the experiences of Galileo, Columbus, Turner and Wagner—have had to run this gantlet. I should be the last to complain of this fact, for many unworthy theories also undergo disparagement. Children and lunatics might feel a great sincerity about their efforts, but that is no reason for the resistance of the world to innovations to be dropped. It is through this resistance, this gantlet, that the poor theory is separated from the challenging new and sound theory.

What is Color-Music Expressionism in painting? Let me tell you of my first experience with "color hearing." When I was a child of about six, I had my first synæsthetic experience with color and sound. My mother, from whom I have probably inherited my passion for music, had taken me to an all-Schubert concert. The last number was Schubert's famous serenade, whose melody my mother often used to hum as a lullaby. I had never heard a full orchestra play it, and when it was finished my eyes were sparkling and my cheeks were flushed—so I have been told. "It was beautiful," I exclaimed to my mother, "especially when I saw those green and blue and purple and all kinds of clouds passing by." My mother laughed at such a childish fancy, repeated what I had said to my father and the rest of the family and teased me about it for a long time.



All the same, colors kept recurring to me when I heard certain musical sounds, such as the ringing of church bells, or the singing of birds, or even the echoings of my own voice. In spite of this, however, it was not the beginnings of Color-Music that I painted after my father had given me my first paint box. No, under the influence of my art instructor I leaned toward academicism. In fact, spurred on by financial necessity, I became a rather successful portrait painter. All the while the divine spirit of music was luring me.

One day I painted an imaginative portrait of Richard Wagner, who was a deity to me. While I was working on this portrait, I thought a good deal about him and his dream of a union of all the arts. Then I thought: why can I not find a way of employing my gift of synæsthetic perception, a gift with which few are endowed—only five per cent, according to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*?—Why should I not try to carry out the dream of the great musical genius Wagner? Then and there I renounced my career of portraiture and started to experiment on canvas with color formations—cloud-like abstractions of the colors I had beheld under the spell of music.

One day a friend of mine, an art dealer, inveigled Josef Stransky, then the conductor of the New York Philharmonic Society symphony orchestra, to visit my studio to see what my friend called "extraordinary musical phenomena" unique in his experience. Stransky was a lover of art and a collector, and later in his life when he retired from conducting, he became a partner in the celebrated art firm of Wildenstein. On this occasion he found my experiments most interesting, being, as he was, interested in both music and painting. At the height of his visit when he saw my interpretation of a snatch of Wagner's Good Friday Spell from *Parsifal*, Stransky began humming the music, and then said to me, pointing to my cloud effects, "Is that all you see in the music?"

"That—plus heaven," I answered.

"Then, for *heaven's* sake, paint it, my boy!" the maestro exclaimed.

Thus I came to mold my synæsthetic abstractions into symbolic formations. Abstraction only was not sufficient. With the aid of my imagination, I now molded my synæsthetic abstractions, and began a serious career in Color-Music. The next time I saw Stransky face to face was some twenty years later; the occasion of this second meeting was his invitation to me to exhibit my musical expressions in painting at the famous and exclusive gallery of Wildenstein.

In getting into my subject, I must pay my respects to Schopenhauer. With many features of his philosophy I am in full disagreement, but it has always been fortifying to me to think that he exalted music to an altogether unique position. He divided the world of art, putting music on one side, and the other arts on the other side, and this is one way of saying that music may be a fourth dimensional experience, whereas the expression in arts like painting and sculpture is a three-dimensional experience. I shall come back to this topic in my next paragraph. In passing, however, I would like to repeat an observation that Thorburn in his book, *Art and the Unconscious*, makes on Wagner which is that when Wagner wished the tragic effect to be supreme, he instinctively withdrew everything that the voice can give and the eye receive, and concentrated purely upon music. This practice of Wagner's bears out Schopenhauer's contention and does lead one to speculate on the fourth dimensional content of music.

Elsewhere I have written on the theories of Albert Einstein and P. D. Ouspensky regarding time, space and the fourth dimension. To these two men time may be the fourth dimension. Since music deals with rhythm, time and space, and since music has more to offer than time alone, may I not speculate and suggest that music may partake of the fourth dimension and even of a fifth dimension, with further potentialities of higher-dimensional experiences? May not

then Color-Music painting abstract from a fourth dimensional concept? Music is the purest of all the arts, being like mathematics in the purity of its thought. It is a matter of regret to me, that because of wartime difficulties in book manufacture, my own book cannot be more fully illustrated with color reproductions, since my work deals solely with color. I shall have to leave the color to the reader's imagination and deal rather with its symbolic formations.

In the preceding paragraph I have mentioned some of the more speculative vistas connected with Color-Music. Now to confine ourselves to the definitely known. The science of the fusion of color and sound should not startle us, for from ancient times trials and attempts have been made to fuse color and sound by the greatest physicists. Who knows but that in some forgotten civilization this fusion may not have existed? We can trace back to the Pythagoreans of early Greece. These Pythagorean Greeks felt that the vibrating gleams of the stars and planets were accompanied by a synchronization of musical sounds, and they claimed they could hear the "music of the spheres," as the heavenly bodies revolved. Aristotle in his *De Sensu* mentions that "colors may be mutually related like musical concords for their pleasantest arrangement." It is worthy of note that from ancient times the colors of the spectrum have been compared to the tones of the diatonic scale.

In the seventeenth century Athanasius Kircher, a Jesuit writer, wrote: "If at the time of a fine concert we could see the air stirred by all the vibrations communicated to it by the voices and instruments, we should be surprised to see it filled with the liveliest and most finely blended colors." A century later, another Jesuit, Père Louis Bertrand Castel, carried Kircher's idea even further by imagining an instrument, a sort of a color-clavichord, by means of which the deaf could enjoy and interpret the beauty of music just as can those who hear.

It is especially noteworthy that Sir Isaac Newton, the

teacher of Kircher and Castel, who had been influenced by Kepler's ideas concerning the harmonies of the universe, was one of the great minds interested in the analogy of color and sound. Newton reasoned that "the breadths of the Seven Primary Colors were proportional to the Seven Musical Notes of the gamut." He also concluded that white light is a blend of different rays of the spectrum, which is the solar light.

We can also include the famous physicist John Tyndall among those who have seriously studied color and sound. Tyndall said: "The spectrum is to the eye what the gamut is to the ear; each color represents a note, and the different colors represent notes of different pitch. The vibrations which produce the impression of red are slower, and the waves which they produce are longer than those to which we owe the sensation of violet, while the vibrations which excite the other colors are intermediate between the two extremes. This, then, is the second grand analogy between light and sound. Color answers to pitch."

Continuing our historical survey of Color-Music antecedents, we come to Charles Henry Wilkinson, who wrote in 1891 on the theory of color and sound relationships. After noting the fact that the seven notes of an octave have a mathematical relationship to each other and that the extent of an octave is mathematically divisible into twenty-four sections, he composed an octave of prismatic colors as follows: Red—C; orange—D; yellow—E; green—F; blue—G; indigo—A; and violet—B. Sharps and flats were placed between the "naturals" of the seven prime colors. Wilkinson said: "By means of this system all music can be transported into color by drafting the notes and chords from the scales, or constructing them from the keyboard; and colors thus set from music, harmonize in consecutive order exactly as they are written or played."

Truly, there were in the nineteenth century many experimenters with color and sound both in America and abroad,

among them being Professor Alexander Wallace Rimington, who had the idea of a color-organ that would employ a mobile color system which would make people "see" sound and "hear" colors. There was also Mary Hallock Greenawalt of Philadelphia, a pupil of the pianist Leschetizky, who devoted much of her life to experimenting with color and music and devised several instruments for her experiments.

Within recent years we have had Adrian Klein in London developing a color projector that is especially adapted for stage lighting, and here in America there is Thomas Wilfred, of whom many people know because of his recitals with the Clavilux. He built his Clavilux, or color-organ, in 1916, after a decade of experimentation. It is constructed with a large keyboard, projectors and flood lights. At first Wilfred used color abstractly, but he soon decided that movement and form were essential. He followed the analogy with music, using the entire spectrum in various ways. The Clavilux keyboard is not a musical keyboard, nor is it arranged by a system of scales. Wilfred's mobile color formations are not actual translations of specific music, nor do they synchronize with any actual musical composition. They are inspired by musical or other emotions. Whatever Wilfred's source of inspiration may be, his color effects suggesting varied forms show a truly impressive talent.

Within the last twenty-five years there came to us from Europe an important book, *Musikalische Graphik*, by Oskar Rainer, in which the fusion of color and music is called "virgin territory" and the author stresses the advantages to both music and pictorial art of an exploration of this "virgin territory." He shows how important the fusion of color and music can be in the staging of operatic art, and he reveals the applicability of it to physics, esthetics, physiology and psychology. Rainer's experiments with the reactions of children to music in color translation are highly interesting and most gratifying to other Color-Music experimenters.

The great physicist, the late Professor Albert A. Michel-

son, in his book, *Light Waves and Their Uses*, published in 1903, is certainly one of those who have given the theory of Color-Music high scientific standing. In this volume he said: "Indeed, so strongly do these color phenomena appeal to me that I venture to predict that in the not very distant future there may be a color art analogous to the art of sound—a Color-Music in which the performer seated before a literally chromatic scale, can play the colors of the spectrum in any succession or combination, flashing on the screen all possible gradations of color, simultaneously or in any desired succession, producing at will the most delicate and subtle modulations of light and color, or the most gorgeous and startling contrasts and color chords! It seems to me that we have here at least as great a possibility of rendering all the fancies, moods and emotions of the human mind as in the older art."

It is little wonder that the *Encyclopedia Britannica* after quoting so eminent a scientist as Michelson goes on to say: "Will Color-Music as a means of expression ever be accorded the dignity of one of the great arts? At present it is impossible to say. Yet there seems no reason why the esthetic enjoyment derived from the perception of the unity of a musical composition, its parts having unfolded in time, should not be aroused, equivalently, by observation of the construction of the various color motifs, of combinations of sequences, and of their logical development of these, in a composition of light. The view is sometimes expressed that color has little or no interest when it is divorced from form or familiar shape, but the literature of the subject is full of enthusiastic reports by those who have witnessed demonstrations of Color-Music."

Scientists have collected numerous instances of synaesthesia, among them being Francis Galton, noted English psychologist who incidentally was a cousin of Charles Darwin. Galton noted instances particularly of "colored audition or hearing." Such cases, Professor William Harper

Davis remarked to me, are of people who see colored masses or forms before their eyes and even imagine colors when thinking of sounds. This has been precisely my own experience, and it is from these colored clouds and masses that suggest images as the clouds in the sky suggest images, that I mold the symbolism of my paintings. I shall explain this more fully in a moment. Right now I want to emphasize that color-hearing has been extensively analyzed by men of the rank of Tichener, Seashore, Nussbaumer, Fechner, and Féré amongst others of scientific eminence. Having given a historical approach to colored audition, I feel free now to offer my own analysis of Color-Music as it is exemplified in my paintings.

But, I can imagine the reader saying, can this synæsthesia of color-hearing with which some people seem to be born be developed by non-synæsthetic persons? Can such persons by study and by associating the musical scale with the spectrum become appreciators of Color-Music? I must explain that the diatonic scale is a succession of eight tones; in reality, seven, since the last is a repetition of the first. This scale is subject to modification by half tones which can produce the major or minor moods. The spectrum, on the other hand, is clearly defined by the noted scientist, Dr. Elisha Gray, in his book, *Nature's Miracles*:

"In the musical scale each note differs from the other in the matter of pitch; and pitch, as we have seen, is the rate of vibration per second. Colors differ in pitch the same as musical tones and there are about an octave of them. If we allow a beam of sunlight to come into a dark room through a small aperture and let it fall on a white screen, there will appear a round spot of white light that is an image of the sun. If now we intercept the beam of light with a prism placed with the image downward, there will appear on the screen a band of colors, one above the other. They will appear in the following order, beginning at the bottom: Red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo,

violet, and the whole is called the solar spectrum. When a ray of light passes from a rarer to a denser medium—as from air through glass—the rays are bent out of their course, and the bend is different from each other. This bend is called refraction. The red ray is the least refracted and the violet is the most; and this is why the violet appears at the top of the band of colors. This difference of bend in the color-rays is due to the difference of wave-length. For light, like sound, has a definite wave-length for each vibration-period. In order that we may better understand, let us go back a little and tabulate the vibration-period of each color:

|        |       |                 |            |
|--------|-------|-----------------|------------|
| Red    | ..... | 477,000,000,000 | per second |
| Orange | ..... | 506,000,000,000 | “ “        |
| Yellow | ..... | 535,000,000,000 | “ “        |
| Green  | ..... | 577,000,000,000 | “ “        |
| Blue   | ..... | 622,000,000,000 | “ “        |
| Indigo | ..... | 658,000,000,000 | “ “        |
| Violet | ..... | 699,000,000,000 | “ “        |

“It will be seen from the foregoing table that the vibration-rate per second increases from red to violet. The wave-length of the slowest vibration, to wit, red, is the greatest, the same as in sound, and the shortest is that of the most rapid—violet. The more waves there are in a given distance, the greater the bend will be in passing from one medium to another.”

The spectrum, therefore, suggests the musical scale. It is quite reasonable to believe or postulate that if one wishes to paint music, he may follow out this idea of the correspondence of the colors of the spectrum to the musical scale. Let me add that colors demand just as much as does the diatonic scale the chromatic tones. Below is my own Color-Music scale.



## TWELVE NOTES OF THE TONAL SCALE

|                |                                  |
|----------------|----------------------------------|
| C—Red          | B—Red-Violet                     |
| D—Orange       | C# (or D $\flat$ )—Red-Orange    |
| E—Yellow       | D# (or E $\flat$ )—Yellow-Orange |
| F—Yellow-Green | F# (or G $\flat$ )—Green         |
| G—Blue-Green   | G# (or A $\flat$ )—Blue          |
| A—Blue-Violet  | A# (or B $\flat$ )—Violet        |

Like all sound, music is recognized by physicists and psychologists as possessing volume, that is, as having space and intensity due to atmospheric vibrations. It goes without saying that music cannot be copied in pigment, for it cannot be seen unless the painter is endowed with the kind of synæsthetic ability that permits seeing music. But even so, there are limitations. One can dream that perhaps science in the future will facilitate the seeing of music through a medium by which all will "hear" color, but at present it is the tiny minority—the five per cent according to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*—who can master the art of Color-Music through their gift of detecting color in music. All the same some of us may develop a color association with music according to the table I have given above.

The Marcotone System devised by Edward Maryon is a method by which children have been taught to hear melodies in colors that are in accordance with the musical scale. But unless the child can master the contrapuntal arrangement of harmony, that too has its limitations.

In order to develop color-hearing I would suggest for the benefit of those who desire to develop it that they study a simple melody of color-hearing, and then try a melody of a more serious nature. People who would pursue the study of Color-Music must necessarily be lovers of fine music. One has to be inspired by fine music in order to paint it, and one must, of course, develop in oneself the best possible knowledge of painting. Color-Music is truly an unusual art, for it requires of the artist knowledge of the combined arts, not

just of a single art. The viewer of Color-Music must likewise judge it from a double angle, that is, from the angle both of music and of painting. I do not imply that the viewer of Color-Music painting must be either a professional artist or professional musician, but at least he must be appreciative of both arts, and, most important, he must be able to place himself at the center of the artist's thought and become part of the artist himself in order to grasp the artist's point of view.

I must add that even the most synæsthetic person in Color-Music could nevertheless be a most uninspired artist in that form of expression, if that person is lacking in imaginative powers. For it is not the abstraction alone that one receives from music that counts; it is the symbolical concept that gives vitality. Imagination is a great factor in music; it is the inspiration of the composer; it is the *sine qua non* of great expression.

Here I would like to mention the gratification I received in an early stage of my Color-Music career when a critic on the New York *Herald* reviewed a painting I had made from an expression in Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*. "There is in the center (of the painting)," he wrote, "a tone of purest emerald green, and I recall that when hearing Mme. Tetrazzini back in the days when her voice did as she wished, I distinctly saw a patch of emerald green just as the singer took a high 'F'."

To pass now from basic theory to my method, about which I have often been asked, let me explain that just as a musician employs his staff upon which to spread the mood of his composition—the majors and the minors, the notes, the crescendos and the diminuendos, pitch, the modulations, chords and arpeggios, sequences, contrapuntal structures of melody, and the like—just so do I use my canvas for pigimentary interpretation. I likewise introduce when it is necessary to the music the timbre of the percussion instru-

ments, like the cymbals, which I believe pervade my expression of Borodin's Polovetzian Dances from *Prince Igor*.

The composer of music receives his inspiration from Nature or from some ideality; the Color-Music painter receives his inspiration from music. Beethoven and Schubert abstracted their inspirations from Nature. The former even went further; he *saw* pictures when composing his music, according to Emil Ludwig in his book, *Beethoven*. My inspirations have been abstracted from music. I must not, however, be understood as trying to paint an entire musical composition. To do that would require an immense amount of canvas. I abstract only a snatch of the music; the snatch might be one or several motifs of melody, or perhaps only a few bars of music. Here comes to mind something the art writer, Lionello Venturi, once said: "If the whole is not known except through the parts, the parts are not really known except through the whole." Naturally I agree that it is desirable to understand a work of art in whole or in parts that add up to the whole, but I must add the qualification that musical paintings accept the fact that music is fugitive and expression on canvas of this type must be either integral through the parts or in staccato form as required.

Yes, these few snatches or motifs are to Color-Music as important in a way as is the entire musical composition. To make a comparison, they are like the cell of the human "Gestalt." To illustrate the point further, when an artist wishes to paint a body of marching troops, he does it so that the viewer of the painting discerns only the forefront of this body of soldiers; the rest sinks perspectively into the background. One sentence, even a phrase or a word has sometimes made a book famous; lacking this sentence or phrase, the book might have lost its vital meaning. To me the only logical method of interpreting musical scope in painting is the selection of snatches, as I have done. Of course, via

the cinema, an entire composition can be expressed by using limitless amounts of film.

I use my pigments musically, employing the colors of the spectrum to correspond with the musical notes. When there are contrapuntal effects in the music, I reproduce them too on my canvas by playing color against color, which is like playing note against note. But first I receive my mood from the musical composition. If it is in the major key, for example, then the undertone of my canvas demands the major colors like red, orange, yellow, and so on. If in the minor key, then the undertone would be deep shades of blue, violet, indigo, green, and so on.

Is it possible for one to picture or associate a melancholy piece of music, a dirge for instance, or some other tragic musical expression written in a minor key, with the flamboyant vibrant colors of red, orange, or yellow? Certainly not! It will be the deep blues, greens, purples, etc., which one will perceive or at least associate with such music. On the other hand, a lively scherzo or some other piece of musical gaiety could not be pictured in the minor colors mentioned above. Of course, there are peculiar psychological reactions in some rare cases because people at a time of distress have focused upon an object with a certain color, and this color has become deeply associated with their suffering. The color of the object might be a major one usually inspiring a gay feeling, and yet it will have thereafter a subconscious negative effect, amounting sometimes to repugnance, and for this person such a negative effect may persist throughout the rest of his life.

It is interesting, by the way, to notice the truth of color-music as embodied in folk-sayings. Who has not heard people speak of having the "blues" or of facing a "blue Monday"? The ordinary people instinctively think of blue when they are depressed; when they are in a major mood, they will say that they feel "in the pink of condition." Moreover, a major key can be modulated into a minor or partly

minor key, thus giving, as it were, an additional flavor to the dish. Therefore we can say conclusively that if a painter expresses music in pigments that are not basically associated with the mood of his composition, his interpretation cannot be true.

Let us assume that I am now ready to place the notes of the melody of the motif or snatch of the music over the undertone. This I do by molding my pigmentary notes into symbols, as a sculptor would mold his clay from his inspiration. Just as in Nature cloud formations lead us to imagine they look like various objects or figures, just so do I permit my imagination to create out of my color formations, symbolic representations inspired by the spirit of the music, or the spirit of the title, or by subconscious reaction to the title, this last being something I shall comment on later in this chapter.

At various times ascending or descending scales present themselves in the music. This I interpret by harmonization of color effects to bring out the desired musical rendition or timbre. Furthermore, the dimensional depth—that is, perspective in my painting—is the translation of the reach of a note from a lower pitch to a higher pitch, like the reach of one or several octaves.

I was once asked by a skeptical music critic how I would interpret the musical chord. Here I shall let Professor William Harper Davis, writing on my work in *The Musical Courier*, June, 1933, answer for me:

"Finally, the musical chord, I contend, is the one thing easiest to translate from tone to color. A chord is a combination of pitches or notes, a 'fusion,' experienced through the ear as a whole, yet analyzable into elements. It is a complex, perceptual, and esthetic unit; a compound experience, a mixture or blend of separate tone elements in unison. A color chord is a compound of separate color tones, having a certain definable relationship—not mixed on the palette by a painter so as to obliterate the contributory pigments in

the manufacture of a new single color, but so placed upon his canvas in its elements that, while they may be separately discriminated, they may also be blended by the eye and experienced as a unit whole, a complex unit capable of registering a simple effect. Even the vibrations of air in the elements united in a musical chord may be compared to the vibrations of ether which give separate and blended vision of colors. A somewhat mobile effect of 'vibrancy,' as painters talk, is actually noticeable by the eye, especially when in motion or at different distances from the canvas. There is a kind of alternating analysis and fusion of the chordal colors. I always supposed the 'color chord' idea to be a familiar one, as technically it is among students of color, for example, the late Professor Ostwaldt. It should be interesting to musicians, especially in relation to such paintings as that under discussion, where it figures essentially in the artist's point of view, which is important in the case."

From the color scale an unlimited amount of colors can be developed. I have previously mentioned Dr. Elisha Gray and his book, *Nature's Miracles*; let me here quote from him on this point: "There is," says Dr. Gray, "an inconceivable number of variations and proportions of color, and as each variation may produce a variation of tone, or tint, we can see how all the delicate shadings of a poem or a symphony in color may be produced. Some time color and color-tones may be classified and arranged in their order of succession and combination, and by some sort of instrument that will cause them to appear and disappear—played upon as we do upon a musical instrument to produce the effect of sound-coloring. Color will then become a language of emotion, as music is now."

A perfected system of color-tones should be of interest even to artists who, although qualified for their special pursuits, are not particularly qualified for musical interpretation. This brings to my mind a certain art critic who saw a similarity in my interpretations of Wagner and Puccini, because he

found certain colors of the first repeated in the second. He commented on this apparent incongruity. What this uninitiated viewer of my paintings failed to take into consideration was that the notes of the musical scale are like the letters of the alphabet, except that the musical scale is limited to a series of seven tones whereas the alphabet has twenty-six letters. Therefore the painter of color-music has a very small pigmentary alphabet, although, as stated previously, he can develop an almost unlimited number of colors to signify inversions and contrapuntal structures. The "similarity," then, which this critic detected in my paintings of Wagner and Puccini music was just like the similarity that one can detect in the words, "calm" and "clam." Both words have the same four letters; the letters are identical, but the arrangement of the letters is different, and so the two letter-formations have totally different meanings. Again consider the inverted spelling of a word like "era"; spelt backwards it gives us "are." "No" spelt backwards becomes "on." Had this critic understood that a single color by itself is meaningless, just as a single unaccented or unrelated note of music is meaningless, he would have been more cautious in his remarks. Strike a single note C on the piano. Though its tone contains 256 vibrations per second, a fact that may interest the physicist, it is without meaning to the average auditor unless it is shaded or accented, like the first note of Wagner's overture to *Rienzi*, or unless it is joined to another note or notes which resolve into a triad or other chord formation.

On the occasion when I was invited to exhibit my paintings at the Museum of Science and Industry in connection with the Fantasia Art Contest, an art critic remarked upon what he called the "sameness" of my paintings and upon my "limited palette." Probably he meant to imply that there was a repetition of the *spectral colors*. But had he been acquainted with my theory of music-color translation, he would have known that the auditory range of the ear is about

eleven octaves, whereas the visible spectrum is about one octave embracing seven color notes and one repeated note. It is possible that pigmentary research may develop to a point to stagger the imagination, but that is the range at present. The "sameness" to which this art critic took exception was in fact precisely my characterization or technique which pervades all my canvases. And it is, I must add, the same "sameness" which one will find in the paintings of Turner, Corot, Monticelli, or Monet. You will also find this "sameness" in the music of Wagner's Tetralogy, in the waltzes of Johann Strauss, and in Bach and Beethoven. And yet my paintings differ markedly from one another in their tone-colors; the major or minor moods are easily discernible; one acquainted with my color-tone method, or even one not familiar with it, can differentiate between my expressions of the *Prelude to Lohengrin* and my *Introduction to the Third Act of Lohengrin*, both taken from the same opera by Wagner. The symbolization and structure of the music are, too, quite different.

As I have said, I mold my musical colors into symbols, and sometimes these symbols are inspired by the composer's title for his music. By way of illustrating how I introduce these symbols to strengthen the composer's point of view, let me refer to my expression derived from the *Prelude* to Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*. Wagner's libretto was based upon an old Irish theme, relating an earthly love story that was greatly inferior to this heavenly music of Wagner, music that in this instance was above Wagner himself. Nietzsche, who for some years was Wagner's admirer and champion, disapproved of the libretto and particularly of *Parsifal*, and the Wagner-Nietzsche friendship was broken. In my painting I did not attempt to reproduce the story of the program but sought to capture the spirit of the title, *Tristan and Isolde*, by molding the spirit of the story into four stages of love: physical love, brotherly love, maternal love (which I consider the highest form), and spiritual love.



At certain times when painting, I cannot help associating the music subconsciously with its title; this occurs when the music itself is strongly suggestive of the title, as it seemed to me when I made my painting from Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries*.

Among musical compositions that suggest outrightly their titles are Debussy's *Afternoon of a Faun*, in which the flute dominates, and Rimsky-Korsakoff's *Flight of the Bumble Bee*, where the violin strings give us the droning buzz of the insect. But in general the titles of music and programs are without meaning to the painter of music. The composer of music is certainly entitled to his program, but my inspiration comes from the music itself except for the inspiration received from the titles I mentioned above, and it is the inspiration from the music out of which I body forth my imaginary concept on the canvas.

Speaking of titles of music, the following is an amusing game. Submit an untitled musical composition to a group of music enthusiasts and critics and ask for title suggestions. You will get a great variety, and many of them may well be the last thing that entered the composer's mind. On the other hand, take the title, *Romeo and Juliet*, which has been used by Tchaikowski, Gounod, Bellini, and Berlioz; how differently each of these reacted to the same title! Indeed many composers, like some literary men, give a title to their works only after they have completed them. Schumann, for instance, entitled some of his compositions as long as six months after their completion.

I remember very well the momentary embarrassment of a famous pianist who was asked the title of a piece by a great composer which he had just played. He had forgotten the title. Yet he remembered the music perfectly. Had the title been closely connected with the content of music, like Rimsky-Korsakoff's *Bumble Bee*, he would of course have responded instantly. Even absolute music, that is music without a program, must nevertheless be tagged for identi-

fication with some such title as Opus 1 or First Symphony, etc.

I have dwelt on this business of titles in order to show how unreasonable it is to ask of me that my individual expressions of music should coincide with the precise reactions of my varied viewers and critics with their different tastes and degrees of knowledge of art and music. It is true that I have had the pleasure of corroborative reactions from musicians like the composer Ravel and orchestral leaders like Walter Damrosch, the late Josef Stransky, and others. But a person viewing my paintings who had no knowledge of music and art, who had not been inspired by music and art, and whose imaginative experiences had been exceedingly limited could not understand them. Perhaps from the standpoint of color and form he might have secured something from the paintings. But it would have been as useless to expect intelligent appreciation from this person as it would be to try to extract a reaction to music from a person unable to read the notes of a musical score, which a qualified musician would read—and perhaps even get from the reading a great inspiration. There are, of course, some people of very fine appreciative powers who cannot read or play music and yet are more imbued with the spirit of music than some who have professionally studied music and performed it. It is therefore entirely reasonable for me to use the composer's material for building my pigmentary conception, just as the composer of music goes to Nature or other sources of imaginative stimulus.

Many art writers, among them Alfred H. Barr of the Museum of Modern Art, have pointed out the musical qualities of certain non-objective paintings by Kandinsky, Klee, and others. In his book, *Cubism and Abstract Art*, Barr says: "The painter of abstractions can and often does point to the analogy of music in which the elements of rhythmic repetition, pitch, intensity, harmony, counterpoint, are composed without reference to natural sounds of either 'heli-

copter' or 'the President in a cutaway'." Well, this is a rather far-fetched comparison. From what source did these writers receive their information? According to my study of music and art, the efforts of these painters cannot be considered worthy of a musical analogy. Geometric lines and circles are not symbols representative of music. They are static impressions, unvibrative, and devoid of the fugitive quality of music. Which reminds me—isn't the expression attributed to Goethe, "Architecture is frozen music," rather absurd? When music is frozen, it is static, without movement. Music moves continuously, it is fugitive. When it does not move or vibrate, it is not music.

Another word on music and the non-objective painters: If there is a widespread struggle between the Anthro-Concentric and the Anthro-Eccentric types, which I discuss in detail elsewhere, over the general understanding of concrete art, then how much more difficult is it to see and comprehend the abstract representations of art? In the present stage of humanity, we are still addicted to concreteness. For a simple example, we still prefer to take our food concretely instead of in the abstract form of pills. If the day should come when pills take the place of our present menus, then our entire physical and mental make-ups will function in accord with the new custom. Up to now, however, the human body is still functioning according to the pattern set by Nature from time immemorial, and *concreteness* is the dominating motif in the pattern. So it is with art.

Art which relies upon abstractions—I mentioned some examples above—eliminates elements that are attractive to standard taste and becomes a mathematical formula in essence; it cannot be considered art in the sense of art as handed down from past ages. Parenthetically, I might say that if abstractions are analyzed from a scientific angle, we must reason about them as scientists do. Scientists dwell on the most minute particle of matter, the atom, and even study the constituents of the atom, the proton and the electron,

which they break down into incredibly minute universes. But Nature has arranged for us to see matter, which includes art, concretely and not with scientific perception. It is to be noted that frequently Nature is in conflict with science.

Of course, any art is an abstraction whether it comes from Nature or from imagination. All great artists have made such abstractions which they unified into a concrete ideology. But the present-day "art" abstractions of many painters for whom a propaganda barrage has been laid down are in reality nothing more than puzzles to the public and even to the self-hypnotized artist sometimes. Why should these puzzles be offered to the art public? Why not offer them to mathematicians? Or perhaps to magicians? Speaking of puzzles, here is the most puzzling fact of all, the fact that these "abstractionists" and other "modernists" will tell you that art need not be explained and then proceed to put *titles on their works* which hint at an explanation. These "artists" suffer under the delusion that their art is only for an intellectual minority, like Einstein's theory, and is too cerebral for the average person to grasp. May I suggest that their art resembles the royal garments with which the King in Andersen's fairy tale deluded himself?

Returning to Color-Music, it is axiomatic that in order to add the musical quality to painting, one must express oneself like the music itself. This is my reason for employing the broken, juxtaposed, graded prismatic color system. Nor do I emphasize by detailed line the figures and other symbolizations of my pictorial compositions, but I resort to impressionistic concepts, the reason being that like the music which I depict, these formations must be fugitively expressed. The symbolism of my paintings is representative of the spirit of the music; sometimes it incorporates the spirit of the composer's program by injecting the spirit of poetry, the dance, philosophy and mysticism. Primarily this symbolism is meant to arouse the imaginative faculties of the viewer in order to strengthen the composer's message.

Truly, there is a reciprocal art of color and music, as the following examples will show, if any more examples are needed to drive home the reciprocity. The composer Moussorgsky received his inspiration for his composition, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, from a visit to the memorial exhibition of the work of his deceased friend, the artist Hartmann. Rachmaninoff, we are told, paid tribute to the painter Böcklin for the inspiration of the composition called *The Island of the Dead*. In reverse, Liszt's *Battle of the Huns* gave inspiration to the painter Kaulbach. All of these were, however, purely programmatic expressions and have nothing to do with the basic principles of music interpretation by the method I have explained.

Before concluding this chapter with some autobiographical material, it would be well once more to stress the hard scientific research that has gone into color. Oliver L. Reiser in his well-titled work, *The Alchemy of Light and Color*, refers to Helmholtz's tri-chromatic theory of vision. Helmholtz even produced a mathematical equation of three variables and assumed three different types of nerve fiber, each carrying its own impulse. But as Reiser observes, "we see that to explain the various aspects of color vision one may assume (a) different kinds of the receptors and nerve fibers in the visual mechanism, or (b) one single nerve fiber capable of transmitting manifold differentiations."

Here, too, if I give a table of associations of the notes of the musical scale with images of very constant colors cited by the psychologist Boring Langfeld Weld, it is to reinforce what was said earlier about the scientific basis for a Color-Music scale. We experimenters in Color-Music painting have every reason to be grateful to researchers in chromesthesia. Langfeld summarized his research as of two years, 1905 and 1912, and here is his table.

|         | 1905                        | 1912                                 |
|---------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| C       | .....Red                    | .....Red                             |
| D Flat  | ...Purple                   | .....Lavender                        |
| D       | .....Violet                 | .....Violet                          |
| E Flat  | ....Soft blue               | .....Thick blue                      |
| E       | .....Golden yellow          | .....Sunlight                        |
| F       | .....Pink                   | .....Pink apple blossom              |
| F Sharp | ...Green blue               | .....Blue green                      |
| G Flat  | ...Greener blue             | .....Greener blue                    |
| G       | .....Clear blue             | .....Clear blue                      |
| A       | .....Cold yellow            | .....Clear yellow, hard, not<br>warm |
| B Flat  | ....Orange                  | .....Verges on orange                |
| B       | .....Very brilliant coppery | .....Very brilliant coppery          |

In view of such scientific support a Color-Music painter does not have to feel apologetic about the theoretical basis of his medium. A correlation of sound and color definitely and conclusively exists. "The structural basis of music is vibration," writes H. Ernest Hunt, and in this chapter I have emphasized the vibrative quality of music to which the Color-Music painter must be sensitive, and to which I claim that those who find "musical analogy" in non-objective paintings are not sensitive. Percy A. Scholes has observed that many composers affirm that their inspiration is not so much a musical motif or theme as "merely a strong and definite mood which possesses them and which they thereupon, under a feeling of compulsion, proceed to express in music." This has its importance for us because as Scholes goes on to say, "It is merely the accident of his being a musician that results in its expression, not in a poem, drama, novel, picture, or a piece of statuary, but in a symphony, fugue, or nocturne."

And now to close on an autobiographical note. After I had given many one-man exhibitions in America, certain French people visiting here on matters of international

import suggested that I show my art to the Parisians, who, they thought, would welcome it. So, in the spring of 1931, I held my first Color-Music exhibition in Paris at the well-known galleries of Bernheim-Jeune. By the criterion established in the old saying that imitation is a form of the sincerest flattery, my 1931 exhibition was a success, for the following year a number of European artists living in Paris, inspired by my exhibition, banded together in an organization called Les Artistes Musicalistes. They formed a new school of painting on the theory of music. Naturally I was asked to join. We held our first exhibition in Paris at the Renaissance Gallery in 1932 under the patronage of former Premier Edouard Herriot and a glittering constellation of those eminent in the arts and letters, among them being Paul Valéry, Gustave Charpentier, Maurice Ravel, Paul Signac, Arthur Honegger, Jean d'Udine, A. Dezarrois, curator of the National Museums of France, Arsène Alexandre, the art writer, and numerous noted political figures. Naturally, I disagreed with the particular interpretations of musical color and symbolization contributed by my fellow-artists, but basically we were groping for the same light to lead the way to a new expression, and we had this underlying feeling of unity of aim.

The progress of this society was disrupted by the advent of that worst Anthro-po-Eccentric of human thought, the bloodthirsty dictator, Hitler. What became of our members, the French and the others hailing from parts of Europe now under Hitler's heel, I do not know. If they have been destroyed by the cruelties of this war, they still have made their contribution to the cause of Color-Music and have strengthened the foundation of this art. If they are still alive after this war and France is free to breathe again, I look forward to the time when Les Artistes Musicalistes can join together once more to further the development of Color-Music art and to spread its message to the whole world of culture.

Elie Faure, the French art writer, has said that "when Italian music arrives, great painting dies." He also has asserted that after Wagner and Nietzsche German art almost disappeared. But this is a very problematical statement to make. I conclude that so long as music and painting are regarded as separate arts, one will dominate the other. But when the time comes that these two arts are harmoniously united, each drawing inspiration from the other, then perhaps there will be a simultaneous functioning of the arts. And from such an ideal union, who knows what greater arts may be born? This is not so remote as some might think. When an artist shall be so proficient in the art of music as to be deeply inspired by it and is able to express his thought musically on canvas, and vice versa for the musician, we shall then have, as Richard Wagner once dreamed, the ideal marriage of the two arts.

In conclusion, I submit my theory to the reader, to be accepted or rejected on its merits. Though I have been applauded by many, I have received my share of criticism from those who misunderstand me. But I do not complain. I reflect that giants in the history of world progress have been ridiculed and pilloried; many years after the publication of *Origin of Species*, Charles Darwin was the butt of mockery and the theories of his great book were involved in a sensational court trial where prominent statesmen, lawyers and clergy contended. The outcome of the trial left the great English naturalist marching on to a greater tribunal, that of time itself. I do not compare myself to these great men; I am only consoled by the thought that they too contended against inertia and active resistance to the new. It will be time that will recognize whatever message my work has to convey, and no amount of high-pressure salesmanship can affect the verdict of time.

I do not profess to have discovered the final solution of Color-Music, and some critics have misunderstood some of my claims. If I have taken music as my model, it is because



music has been my greatest inspiration. Truly, as Addison once said, "If there is anything heavenly on earth, it is music." If I have used the spectrum and the analogy of the musical scale, it is because I have found this to correspond with my synæsthetic perception. Yet I regard myself as only a humble pioneer in the progress of Color-Music. If others advance further toward the solution of this form of expression, I shall embrace their discoveries and rejoice!

## Chapter XXII

### THE PHYSICS OF COLOR

*If white and black soften and unite  
A thousand ways, is there no black and white?*  
—Alexander Pope

ANY DISCUSSION OF THE physics of color must begin with light. If light is turned off or is not present, one cannot see. That is obvious. But this obvious fact does not indicate how much light has to do with color. Light actually brings about various shades of color, and results in what seems to be an unlimited number of variant shades. Under certain conditions of light, white may turn to gray, or gray may turn white. The eye that would deal with colors has to deal with lighting.

This brings up the "mechanical eye" that Wilenski—to whom, by the way, the couplet by Pope which heads this essay is an answer—was so fond of dilating upon. This "mechanical eye" is simply the natural eye which has to see, even to see a Cézanne. Perhaps, one might infer, Wilenski wants the artist to use achromatic shades. Wilenski has also maintained that the ear hears more quickly than the eye sees, to which the natural rejoinder is that some people think rapidly, others slowly, and his remark has only the significance that the rejoinder has. In short, Wilenski has no more of value to contribute to the physics of color than he has on most other topics of interest to the art-conscious public.

The color white is of particular interest. Placed in different lights, it will be of different shades. It might even, as noted at the outset, become grayish. Turner and Corot used grays, but there happen to be all shades of grays,

browns, blues, blacks, and so on. Gray color is a mixture of white and black. White, scientifically speaking, is the resultant of prismatic colors or lights coming through the solar system; in other words, it is sunlight. The human eye will perceive a combination of colors and the results will be the same whether the color white comes about from a mixture of light or a mixture of colors. Darker lights and shades added to white will give the color gray.

The point to notice is that white is not a simple color. It is the color of sunlight. Take lights of variegated hues, rotate them upon a screen, and you will get white. Any two colors which together give white are complementary colors. The black is used to get intensity. Newton has pointed out that white light is a combination of all colors of the spectrum. Pure spectral colors superimposed on the screen give a violet appearance.

Here is another fact of some interest. The average person can sing the diatonic scale, but it is very difficult for this average person to vary this scale by going to a chromatic note. For the eye, contrast is the equivalent of this variation of the scale.

The Pointillist painters were particularly skilled in the physics of color. They applied colors in juxtaposition so that at a distance the eyes of the observer would receive a fused effect; the shadows were composed of complementary colors. For example, the shadow of yellow is bluish, of green the shadow is purple.

Another item in our knowledge of color is the fact that the colors of the spectrum are more easily remembered than black and white.

In addition to the collection of factual items about color, the physics of color leads us to theories of matter, and some of these are quite complicated. Among them is the Quantum Theory originated by Max Planck and expounded by Niels Bohr which can be epitomized as follows: "Energy absorbed in quanta in the degree of motion of something possessing

inertia and energy, is indivisible. Named H. Motion is continuity and as matter is discontinuous and exists in the form of atoms and electrons. The radiation or absorption of energy by matter perhaps would be explained, but so far it has failed." Sir Arthur Eddington also carries the subject of physics to brain-twisting lengths. "We cannot," he says, "determine the position of electrons in space or time. But from Nature's point of view matter is meaningless and the visual sight is guided by its form in space and time, and the solid form is our sensual impression."

No one, as a matter of fact, can really explain matter which is made up of atoms composed of protons and electrons, the latter being the speediest things known. A proton is, by definition, composed of matter which contains a positive charge of electricity.

Among the new conceptions of matter is the following which Werkmeister gives in his *Philosophy of Science*. "Electromagnetic deflection of the emitted rays discloses that the 'active' elements give off three distinct types of rays, the alpha-rays, beta-rays, and gamma-rays, respectively. The gamma-rays are of the same nature as ordinary light—though, of course, they are of much higher frequency. . . . The beta-rays consist of streams of electrons. Their presence proves that in at least one of their constituent parts 'atoms' consist of nothing but negative electricity. The alpha-rays are made up of ionized helium atoms, each particle carrying a double charge of positive electricity."

In such a conception of matter we have come a long, long way from Newton and others who held that the Creator had formed matter into solid, massy, hard impenetrable particles, these primitive particles being so hard as to never wear out or break into pieces.

It is well for us to return from these abstruse theories of the physicists to concrete information about color and light. Estimates of the number of detectable shades from the deepest black to the lightest white have ranged from

150 to as high as 700. "The achromatic range of vision," to quote Robert Morris Ogden, "is expressed qualitatively by a graded series of shades from black to white. A normal eye can see a large number of achromatic differences, just as a normal ear can hear a large number of differences in pitch."

Our studies in the physics of color encroach on other sciences and other arts. For instance, climatic and geographic conditions have a known influence upon the arts. Perfumes can give rise to synæsthesia; the inhaling of perfumes stimulates some people to form pictures in the mind, a sort of colored smelling. Always we are confronted with the differences in people. Why do some musical sounds have one kind of reaction to them in some people, and a different kind of reaction in others? This question requires much more analysis than it has received. As a hypothesis, I would say that there is a Gestalt of musical sounds. To illustrate this hypothesis, suppose one strikes on the piano a phrase or series of sixty-fourth notes. Assuming that these sixty-fourth notes could be divided by some device into still more minute fractions, would not these divided sounds resolve themselves into a whole note? In other words, that which goes forward in time or rhythm may come back to us in its original position. In respect to this, it is the whole note composed of vibrations.

But if we cannot grasp that infinitesimal fraction of the already much subdivided sixty-fourths, how can we think of the intervals between each minute note? The mind cannot conceive and think of each note separately, yet it exists just as do those minute divisions of the human body, the cells. Like the Gestalt of matter, music is the Gestalt of time and rhythm, each note being composed of hundreds and perhaps thousands of vibrations due to sound waves which transmit them to the ear.

Finally we must affirm what we said at the outset of this paper. Color exists for us only when we use our sense of

seeing. As soon as we shut our eyes, color does not exist for us but is only something in our imagination. It is likewise with music. To a deaf person sound is non-existent. Yet even the deaf person by employing his imagination may conceive of the effects of musical sounds; this was the case with Beethoven after he became deaf. Beethoven composed great music by applying his imagination. At the end the imagination impinges upon physics.

## Chapter XXIII

### MUSIC AND THE FOURTH DIMENSION

As A COLOR-MUSIC painter, I think it would not be immodest of me to say that professionally I have to delve more into music than painters usually do. And the repeated experience and study of music has led me to ponder upon the fascinating subject of the fourth dimension. The world of painting is a three-dimensional world, but music has to do with time, and much writing that tries to explain the fourth dimension reaches the conclusion that time is the fourth dimension. This is the view of the Russian writer, P. D. Ouspensky, whose views on time I shall epitomize at the end of this essay.

Music is composed of the rhythm of time; harmony and melody make use of time. It is a temporal art, and for that reason I suspect that musical experience partakes of a fourth-dimensional experience. Rhythm is based upon time, and without rhythm there can be no melody or harmony. I would say that music is the profoundest expression of human life. Addison once said that if anything heavenly existed on earth, it was music. This profundity, this sense of something heavenly, may it not be a taste of the fourth dimension? I sometimes think that music even extends into a fifth dimension or even beyond.

Thus it is that music brings us to a great mystery. It was Kant who said that "you cannot think of time as a beginning and yet you cannot think of time as an end." Likewise one cannot conceive of a creator of this universe, for then arises the question, who created the creator? We pass beyond the outskirts of reason in trying to grasp time, but that is also precisely what we do when we try to compre-

hend music. Schopenhauer said that "music reveals the innermost essential being of the world and expresses the highest wisdom in a language the reason does not understand." Our ordinary reasoning power which copes with a tri-dimensional world feels balked when it tries to grasp a higher-dimensional world. We have to go to "language the reason does not understand."

Words without meaning are flat or even linear like one- or two-dimensional objects. But when words are filled with powerful content and feeling, then for me they take on a solid three-dimensional existence. Most of the great thoughts of men have this weightiness and are three-dimensional but the very greatest thoughts may even reach into the fourth dimension. The words of songs are accompaniments of the fourth-dimensional art of music.

In finding something fourth-dimensional about music, I base my opinion on the time-theory of thinkers like Albert Einstein and P. D. Ouspensky. Einstein's theory of relativity holds that space and time depend upon each other, and that there is no absolute space and time. Nature, as Spencer observed, is full of rhythms. In music the terms rhythm and metre mean measuring beats in a piece of music; they have to do with music as duration. This links with the thoughts of Einstein and Ouspensky on the dimensionality of time. Milton perhaps had a poet's intuition of time and music and thought being linked in a higher dimension when he wrote:

. . . *Thoughts, that voluntarie move*  
*Harmonious numbers. . .*

To get some conception of the relativity of time, try to imagine the time of a single wink which may take a second or less, but can you picture sharply to yourself one-sixtieth of a second? Yet that split-second may be to certain microscopic creatures leading what to us are very brief lives something like a number of years. Here the conception of a Gestalt is useful, as I have tried to show in my essay on *The Physics of Color*. I said there that a sixty-fourth note



divided into sixty-fourths might yield the sound of a whole note, that the most minute division might give us again a whole note.

Along this line of thought, let us consider briefly minute differences in the shades of colors. Color B, let us say, can be distinguished from color D, but normal vision cannot distinguish color B from color C which is a shade between B and D. The mind, however, can make the distinction; it can grasp the relative shades of color by using stronger contrasts and then using other means of acquiring knowledge for the intermediate shades than the knowledge derived from specific physical sensations.

On the physical side light was once considered to consist of wave motions in a medium that was called the ether of space. But fourth-dimensional theorists are invading space too. As Oliver L. Reiser has pointed out, "The facts of the Quantum Theory of energy suggest that light is corpuscular in nature rather than undulatory. However, if the fourth-dimensional space-time manifold of relativity theory is substituted for the ether, we can still say that light consists of periodicities." In other words, light consists of electrons; yet the Quantum Theory has not been accepted by some physicists as a practical solution. There is one thing Reiser says in his work, *Alchemy of Light and Color*, that is of special interest to those of us who work in Color-Music: "Since color may be said to be filtered light, the most general solution would seem to consist in regarding colors as being due to some sort of resonance effect."

It is striking how dimensional concepts get into our very language. We speak of thought as being superficial or solid, of being only a light surface thought or of being weighty. The psychologist B. L. Weld, who remarks that man's capacity to utilize the symbolic power of words and images sets him apart from the animals, will speak of emotional strength as the third dimension in psychology because it is concerned with the depth of feeling.

For the sake of rounding out my own speculations on music and the fourth dimension, let me assemble a few notes on Einstein's theory of relativity, the way for which was paved by a memorable address delivered by the mathematician Minkowski. Newton had held that space and time in any absolute sense do not come under the observation of our senses. We do not see or touch them. What we do is to consider some body as fixed in space, or we fixate some event in time and measure from these fixed points. But there are of course relative distances and relative time intervals. I find this Newtonian conception somewhat contradictory of Kant's ideas. Kant's transcendentalism seems to be just the reverse, for to Kant sensuous perception is the main factor of time and space. The debate seems to be unresolved and we may discover that we are in the realm of illusion.

Some writers like Werkmeister have approached the new Einsteinian conceptions which have supplanted Newton's conceptions by studying linguistic representations of temporal relations. In some tongues, the Samoyedic for instance, there are only two temporal forms of the verb and minute temporal distinctions such as we recognize are impossible in these languages.

Werkmeister becomes especially brilliant the nearer he gets to Einstein. He has the faculty of taking the mysterious out of Einstein and of making the theory of relativity sound like the simplest common sense. He shows that there was a contradiction handed on to Einstein resulting from the previous *special* theory of relativity which was applicable only to uniform and rectilinear motions and did not cover accelerated, retarded and rotary motions. What Einstein had to do was to extend the principle of relativity to all motion, to create, that is, a *general* theory of relativity, and this Einstein has done. In Werkmeister's own words, Einstein's theory of relativity "is simply the doctrine that the measured space-time order of events in the world about us depends on the point of view from which we measure. . . . Einstein's

theory once more emphasizes the fact that it is man's mind which provides the schemata for an interpretation of experience, and that ultimately nothing is meaningful that cannot be correlated with such schemata."

Now it is time to quote from Albert Einstein himself, but selection is difficult because of the mathematical formulae which Einstein employs often for the sake of brevity. I think however that in one of his 1921 Princeton University lectures Einstein put his case very well. After discussing pre-relativity physics, he said: "It is neither the point in space, nor the instant in time, at which something happens that has physical reality, but only the event itself. There is no absolute (independent of the space of reference) relation in space and time. . . . The circumstance that there is no objective rational division of the four-dimensional continuum into a three-dimensional space and a one-dimensional time continuum indicates that the laws of nature will assume a form which is logically most satisfactory when expressed as laws in the four-dimensional space-time continuum." I know that the above is not easy reading, but it is worth several readings and hard thinking, for it is the gist of Einstein.

Now, as promised, I come to Ouspensky, who is a profound thinker but will seem to many a more lucid writer on the fourth dimension than Einstein with his mathematical formulae seems. For a number of years Ouspensky was a lecturer in London. Since the Second World War mounted in fury, he has been residing in America. In his well-known book, *Tertium Organum*, Ouspensky begins with Kant who maintained that extension in space and experience in time are not properties pertaining to things but belong to our sensuous receptivity. Ouspensky then indicates some of the difficulties that positive philosophy has with the Kantian conception of time and space and reviews the meaning of the three dimensions known to geometry. But why three only and not ten or fifteen? Is it because of some mysterious property of the universe or because of our own mental limi-

tations that we cannot even imagine to ourselves more than three independent directions?

Ouspensky goes in heavily for analogies. The point is a section of a line; the line is a section of a surface; a surface is a section of a solid. Why then cannot a solid be a section of a four-dimensional body? This leads him to speculate on time. It is impossible, he says, to understand the idea of time without conceiving in imagination the idea of eternity. Extension in time, he argues, is extension in space.

In grappling with his subject, Ouspensky writes much about the complexity of our sight and how we come to learn about relief and perspective. He is most interesting on optical illusions, and he makes a special point of animal psychology and of how animals see the world. One of his most daring thoughts is that every life, which always begins at one point (birth) and always ends at one point (death), is a four-dimensional circle.

His conclusion is that time does not flow; rather it is we who are flowing, wanderers, as he puts it, in a fourth-dimensional universe. Time appears to us as motion, and to a one-dimensional being the next higher dimension appears as motion just as to animals the third dimension appears as motion. Time is an independent direction at right angles to our three-dimensional world. In the end Ouspensky agrees with Minkowski who said: "In Nature all is given; for her the past and future do not exist; she is the eternal present; she has no limits, either of space or time."

I agree with Ouspensky and contend that music opens the portal to the world of the "eternal present."

## Chapter XXIV

### THE FILM "FANTASIA": AN APPRAISAL

A FEW YEARS ago something of a cinematic bombshell hit motion picture audiences in New York and then later all over the country. It was the film, *Fantasia*, a courageous attempt by three outstanding figures in the arts to transfer to the screen in color and form the inspirational quality of music. The intrepid three were Walt Disney, famous for his animated cartoons, Deems Taylor, noted composer and music commentator, and Leopold Stokowski, brilliant orchestra leader.

How astonished Isaac Newton and his followers would have been could they have seen *Fantasia*, for the film exceeded the wildest flights of their scientific and imaginative minds. How thrilled would the Eighteenth Century monk, Castel, who had the modest dream of seeing tapestries of music on the walls, have been to witness an entire musical composition pictorially reproduced. It was an ambitious assignment Disney, Taylor, and Stokowski gave themselves, and they used a big footage of celluloid to carry it out, but I think that they proved by the magnitude of their attempt what I have consistently maintained, namely, that it is physically impossible for a Color-Music painter to portray an entire musical composition on the ordinary sized canvas. This is why, as I have said elsewhere, I choose a motif or snatch of music and not the whole composition when I paint a piece of Color-Music expression.

As was to be expected, some bewilderment was experienced by our motion picture goers as they viewed the innovation. No doubt some of them were of the same mind as the editorial writer in the New York *Sun* in May, 1930,

after seeing one of my exhibitions; he said that "no bold innovator of art has yet attained the ethereal ecstasies of Ira Jean Belmont, who believes that he has wedded music and painting" and went on to comment on the strangeness of the phenomenon. He seemed plainly ignorant of Aristotle, Castel, Newton, Tyndall, and other great men who had theorized about and experimented with the idea of correlating color and sound through lights and other devices. He evidently thought that Wagner's dream of a fusion of the arts would never be actualized.

*Fantasia* evoked much criticism, appraisal, appreciation and depreciation. Music, painting and dance critics all had their say, and there was a division of opinion. No one seemed fully to agree that the experimental attempt to interpret the music of such masters as Bach, Beethoven, Schubert, Stravinsky, Moussorgski, Ponchielli, Tschaikowski, and Dukas was a complete success. Nor would I say that *Fantasia* was entirely successful. It is to be applauded for its pioneering daring, but it did not come up to the standard I have set for myself in Color-Music expression, and certainly it did not measure up to the lofty standard of the giants of music whom it tried to translate into color.

It cannot, however, be doubted that Mr. Disney and other producers have learned much from the experiment. Let us hope that our cinema audiences will be presented next time with an interlude of Color-Music, much shorter than *Fantasia* and more rational both in its elucidation of the music and in its pictorial symbolization. Despite the shortcomings of *Fantasia*, one cannot over-praise Mr. Disney's genius in the moving pictures. He has made millions laugh, and laughter is a great tonic to a world visited with so much sadness and distress. Disney is an ambassador of good will to the whole globe and symbol of universal understanding. You will see from this estimate that it is in no carping spirit that I say that a lengthy production like *Fantasia* cannot awaken in the musically uninitiated a real love of music,

whereas a single composition, a *divertissement* between feature films, coming like a breath of fresh air, could leave the graceful imprints of a musical experience in the consciousness of many of the great public.

Now for some strictures on the details of *Fantasia*. The hyper-fugitive quality of the music was totally lacking in the rendition of the Cantata and Fugue of Bach, which abounds in pursuits of parts or sequences and thoroughly implies fugation or fleeting movement. Instead, in the film we were treated to a series of static abstractions, and these abstractions, although in a cinema sense they moved, did not move *musically*. Furthermore, the colors used here were incongruous with the tone and form of the music. This incongruity was evident also in the repetitions in the music where the symbols and the color motifs did not synchronize with the repetitions. In fact, I find this great error running through the whole series in *Fantasia*. And one cannot avoid the question, why was Bach chosen for an abstract interpretation? These abstractions are meaningless to me. Really, are these abstract interpretations, so reminiscent of astronomical symbols, expressive of Bach's wonderful spirituality? If the film creator thought that abstractionism was indispensable to Bach, why was it not also used for the interpretation of Beethoven, Schubert, and the others?

As for Ponchielli's *Dance of the Hours*, it is one of the most scintillating, gracious, and melodious pieces of ballet music imaginable. I permit myself to wonder if the sensitive Ponchielli had visions of clumsy elephants doing a farcical dance, as in the film, when he was conceiving his delightful composition. Was it his intention that people should double up with hysterical laughter when his exquisite melodies were played? Or did he envisage an audience, its breathing almost stilled, drinking in strains of music which perhaps even the muses on Mt. Olympus would gather to hear?

I must use stronger language when I think of the profanation of the moving and haunting *Pastoral* from Beeth-

oven's Sixth Symphony. The treatment of this was comparable, let us say, to ridiculing a noble oration like Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, or mocking laughter at Yosemite Falls or a marvelous sunset or some other wonder of Nature. I shall, however, let a more temperate pen than mine express condemnation. This is what John Martin, dance critic, wrote in the *New York Times* on November 24, 1940: "He (Disney) has gone right ahead and produced another delectable silly symphony which except for its length is just as good as if its music were not by Beethoven. The laughter of the audience is so continuous, the music is scarcely audible anyhow. What has been gained by using Beethoven? Nothing at all, unless the combination has exploitation possibilities at the box office."

I would register objection, too, to the treatment of Igor Stravinsky's *Sacre du Printemps*. No one should dispute an artist's source of inspiration, but I doubt if Stravinsky had, when inspired to write this music, any visions of prehistoric fauna in an antediluvian setting, reconstructed according to the scientific conclusions of a natural history museum researcher. Judging from the style, I suspect that this prehistoric stuff was an idea of Mr. Disney's. The crucial question is, can it be called the spirit of the music? There was one passage of the Stravinsky music that was grossly misinterpreted, and I wonder if any critic or member of the audience took note of it. This particular passage was repeated in different parts of the film. Yet, when the repetitions occurred on the screen, the formations and colorations varied extremely. Now this passage was written by the composer in the same mood, tempo, pitch and volume of sound. Then should it not have been expressed in the same way each time it appeared on the screen? Here is a glaring inconsistency of music translation! I am especially astounded at this blunder, since Stravinsky himself, a first rate musician and composer, supervised the film.

If I seem to be harsh in my criticism of parts of *Fantasia*,



it is only because I am trying to stamp out misapprehensions which might, like weeds, choke the growth of Color-Music art in the cinema as well as in painting. I nevertheless think that Messrs. Disney, Taylor and Stokowski deserve the heartiest congratulations. They have planted the true seeds too. May they endure with serenity the slings and arrows of the ignorant, the skeptical and the intolerant, and may their seeds come to blossom in the glorious Color-Music gardens of the future! In spite of all mistakes, I am confident that Color-Music will have magical fruit in the future that is inconceivable now to the pioneers.

We are promised new wonders when this horrible war is over. I am almost dazzled with the possibilities of the rehabilitated world. I foresee that the physicist will work hand in hand with the artist and musician, and perhaps the theory of color and sound will stride to a solution faster than we now imagine. Just, for one instance, imagine the scientific synchronization of sound and color in an orchestral rendition of Wagner's Prelude to *Tristan and Isolde*—or Beethoven's Seventh Symphony—or, for music in a lighter mood, a waltz by Johann Strauss. How our audiences of the future will be delighted as the colors respond to the moods and rhythms of the music; it will be like being bathed with the delicious perfume of flowers. What a pinnacle of esthetic delight! Darwin, before he died, said, "Had I my life to live over again, I would have penetrated the mysteries of music." Darwin's unaccomplished task is the challenge the future will meet.



Figure 25. Richard Wagner, the genius of music, who prophesied the union of the arts. From a red chalk drawing by Lenbach.  
(Courtesy of *Musical Courier*)

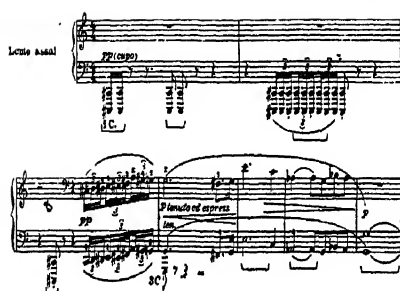


Figure 26. An Expression from *Die Götterdämmerung* (Siegfried's Funeral March) by Richard Wagner. Painted by I. J. Belmont.

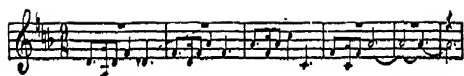


Figure 27. An Expression from *Die Walküre* by Richard Wagner.  
Painted by I. J. Belmont.



Figure 28. An Expression from *The Peer Gynt Suite* (Morning)  
by Edvard Grieg. Painted by I. J. Belmont.

(In the collection of Mrs. Arthur W. Pearce)



Figure 29. An Expression from *Phèdre* by Jules Massenet.  
Painted by I. J. Belmont.

(In the Jeu de Paume Museum, Paris)

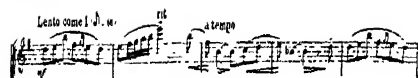


Figure 30. I. J. Belmont and Deems Taylor view the artist's interpretation of an excerpt from Taylor's *Through the Looking Glass* at an exhibition at the Museum of Science and Industry, in connection with the *Fantasia* show sponsored by the Walt Disney Studios and the New York Board of Education.

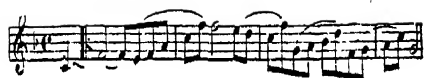


Figure 31. An Expression from *Träumerei* by Robert Schumann.  
Painted by I. J. Belmont.  
(In the Brooklyn Museum)





Figure 32. An Expression from *Bolero* by Maurice Ravel.  
Painted by I. J. Belmont.

## Chapter XXV

### A BRIEF NOTE ON THE DANCE

LET ME DEFINE at once my approach to the dance. I come to it as a Color-Music painter who believes that in his paintings is frequently expressed the spirit of the dance, especially since the dance embodies the very elements of music—namely, rhythm, time, space, mood and tone-color. It follows that I have studied with attentiveness and the keenest interest this ageless expression of human emotions through bodily movement.

It will be helpful here to review the long history of the dance. It goes back to Biblical times; the dance was popular with savages and it is now popular with civilized man. The savage and the barbarian used the dance to sublimate their warlike feelings, their cannibalistic orgies and their witchcraft ceremonies. The ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans exploited the dance for religious ends. With dancing they paid homage to their deities in their temples, often while making sacrifices to them. In India today the temple dances are still a religious expression, and a great one, as those in America who have seen Shan-kar dance can testify.

During the early Christian era, dancing was still a part of church ceremonies, due to Roman influence, and this continued until St. Augustine frowned upon the dance. Practically dormant during the religious Middle Ages, the dance revived during the Renaissance, and this revival has been unchecked until the present.

Since this is not an exhaustive essay, I shall commence with the Fifteenth Century. My reason for this starting point is that fine music had its origin at that time and has

developed and flourished since then to the high standard which music maintains today.

I wish especially to mention the ballet, since the ballet is most expressive of musical form. It began in Italy during the Fifteenth Century and was especially favored at royal courts to celebrate the triumphs of military heroes, to pay honor to kings and to embellish royal weddings. The ballet was perfected in France but did not reach England until the Eighteenth Century.

It so happens today that we associate the ballet principally with the Russian school which, by the way, was subsidized by the Tsars and now is subsidized, I am glad to say, by the Soviet government. I have been a great admirer of Pavlova and of the Russian ballet artists Nijinski and Mordkin. But particularly I wish to pay-tribute to Pavlova whose inspired interpretation of great ballet music will always be retained in my memory. In the technical and emotional interpretation of music, she was music personified. She was visible music in her graceful bodily expression, and this is especially true when she danced to the music of Chopin, Gounod, Tschaikowski, Rimsky-Korsakoff or Ponchielli. And who that has seen her dance to St. Saens' *The Swan* can ever forget her divine grace!

Equally I must pay homage to another great genius of the dance, Isadora Duncan, who died so tragically in 1927. Her style is now known as "interpretative dancing" but I can remember when it was called inelegantly "barefoot dancing." In the first decade of our century pruders used to hold forth on "barefoot dancing" when sincere and brave Isadora dared to bare her feet on the stage to the shocked amazement of some of her audience. Her "sin" was the revival of the Greek form in the classic dance. It was "expressionism" of the emotions of music in the purest form! Both Pavlova and Isadora Duncan were in their different individual interpretations of the terpsichorean art the sublime exponents in our time of the masters' great music.

Has that Anthropo-Eccentric art which I have discussed at length earlier in this book and which has been strongly influenced by Benin and other African expressions, affected the contemporary dance? It has. There is a new school of dancing that has the rhythm and some of the precision of the aboriginal dances of the African barbarians. They correspond to some of the "*école moderne*" of painters who have undergone African influence. Just as the painters cater to people of Anthropo-Eccentric taste, so do the representatives of this new school of dancing. The new school would have us completely overthrow the ballet and other forms of classic dancing as being too "sugary." Like the Anthropo-Eccentric painters, they give us barbaric vulgarity, not something progressively inspiring. If only these dancers had abstracted the spirit of the Ivory Coast and on it built a dance harmony from fine music, somewhat as did Rimsky-Korsakoff and Borodin with their Asiatic dance music, then we might have enjoyed a sensitive and highly progressive accomplishment.

In further illustration of this point, let me mention the talented Brazilian composer, Oscar Lorenzo Fernandez and his *Batuque* from the suite *Reisado de Pastoreio*. This happens to stem from a Negro spiritual of the Brazilian jungle, but his abstraction is conceived as a harmonious expression of color tones and is far removed from the original barbaric source. Remember, I have no objection to innovation in the dance, provided the innovation has spiritual content. I would encourage within my powers such innovation. The desideratum is that the new dance should be an expression of fine music, contemporary or past.

I have noticed that this "pseudo-classic" dancing has its counterpart in the "ballroom" dancing of today. Quite recently I saw in a newsreel the dancing of our soldiers in canteens in North Africa and in Australia; it was the type known as "swing" or "hot." The camera man contrasted it or rather compared it with the dancing of some aboriginals

in those countries which the natives exhibited to the soldiers as a gesture of friendship. The similarity, the unrefined movements, the crudeness and the rudeness were of one pattern. The dancing of these aborigines could have been appropriately accompanied by the sounds of the "Percussion Concert" which the Museum of Modern Art sponsored and which was reviewed, for those who care to look it up, by Robert Bagar in the New York *World-Telegram* of February 8, 1943. What will posterity think of our civilization when it sees movies of our dancing? Bearing in mind that some of the instruments in the "Percussion Concert" mentioned above were mobile brake drums, button gongs, and audio frequency oscillators, it is no wonder that Bagar said: "We may well be on the brink of important musical discoveries—well, on the brink anyway. Just think of orchestral choirs composed of picket fences, turbines, factory whistles, and roller coasters! The possibilities are enormous; tomorrow's Toscanini conducting an earthquake, for example, putting King Canute and his puny commands to the ocean to shame. Perhaps, as one astute auditor remarked, 'This is what we're fighting for.' " Again I ask, how will posterity judge our civilization when it learns of such phenomena?

To turn to more tonic thoughts, and by a natural transition to speak of the opera, I would like to say that it has sometimes occurred to me that another style of opera might be feasible. I have no objection to opera in its present form, whether it be grand opera or a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta; I consider these forms of musical rendition to be self-contained and fully established institutions. They are precisely the forms their composers had in mind, some even writing their own librettos. There is appearing in a Broadway theater a new version of Bizet's *Carmen*. The original music is retained; the novelty of it is a new libretto, a colored cast, and "Harlem," New York as its locale. May I remark that here is an example of what I have stressed many times, that titles and programmes are meaningless to the

lover of pure or absolute music. However, Bizet and other great composers at the time of composing their music were inspired by their experiences and these inspirations were woven into their music. Since there is nothing gained musically by such transpositions as *Carmen Jones*, should not the original expressions of the composer be retained and honored? Wagner by his librettos even displeased his friend Nietzsche, and I think we all agree that Wagner's music was way above his librettos and even above himself at its greatest moments.

Consequently, it is out of no dissatisfaction with the opera as we have known it that I offer the suggestion of an opera without lyrics. It could be accompanied by a story or by the spirit of a story produced by pantomimic action. The scenery would be composed of mobile variegated colored light effects to harmonize and synchronize with the music, these to be handled by experts proficient in Color-Music. It should be a cinematic arrangement to allow for the continuous and ever-changing flow of the music and should also represent the tonal effects of the music, its tempo, structure, fugation, mood, etc. In fine, the scenery would be a translation of the music into color-vibrations and color-formations. It would not be a total abstraction since upon the Color-Music background would be superimposed the figures of the singers enveloped in corresponding color-lights of the background to synchronize with the music.

I often dream of an opera with the mysterious beauty of Debussy's *The Sirens* from his *Three Nocturnes*, the heavenly music unmarred by words, the voice singing sounds that seem to be part of Nature, the whole enhanced by graceful pantomime and subtly attuned lighting effects.

Perhaps Richard Wagner's message to the world, his vision of the union of the arts, the fulfilment of the dream of the Muses on Mount Olympus, may some day be actually fulfilled.

In dreaming about a future opera, I ask myself, are lyr-

ics essential? Remember that today many people do not understand them anyway, since they are sung in a foreign language. And even if they are sung in one's native tongue, many listeners do not catch the words because of the inflections of foreign artists. Pantomimic opera (with voice without words) will help some of the auditors to understand the libretto better by observing the expressive language of bodily movements.

This brings me back to the ballet and its immense esthetic possibilities for the theater and the screen. I hope the reader will share my expectation that the ballet of the future will be in conformity with the basic principles of Color-Music in that it will adopt musically arranged lighting effects. Nowadays, when I attend the ballet, I am frequently jarred by the incongruity of the color on the stage with the music; there is a lack of color-tone harmonization. The major and minor moods are not properly observed, and other details of the music are not translated into color effects, as they well might be.

As for the art of the screen, what an opportunity the moving pictures have to create a new ballet in which symbolic patterns of variegated colors are synchronized with the music! To a Color-Music painter, the prospects for the future of the dance are thrilling.

▼

Part VII

THE IMPORTANCE OF ART

▼





## Chapter XXVI

### IS ART NECESSARY?

RECENTLY AT A FRIEND'S request I called upon a noted industrialist to offer him an opinion on an Old Master which he had inherited from a relative. When my friend introduced me as an "artist," I noticed that this man of business looked me over as if I were a being from some other planet. He began the interview by being a little skeptical and facetious about the painting which was executed in early Italian style. I immediately perceived that it was a superb and authentic Paolo Ucello of the Fifteenth Century and told him about its value. The industrialist had been slightly annoyed by our interruption of his day's routine, but he now smiled with satisfaction when he learned that he was the owner of a valuable monetary asset. Relaxed by the favorable verdict I had given, he now asked me jocularly: "Come now, is art such a necessary 'commodity' as to have induced my uncle to spend so much money on it? What pleasure did he derive from looking at this old piece of painted wood?"

These words came from a man of astute business mentality, an intelligent man in his way, with a college degree to show that he had been fully exposed to education. Yet with all his ability, he was cut off in his mental life. He had never traveled outside of his business sphere to observe what was going on in other parts of life.

"Is art necessary?" I asked in reply. "Look at the pencil you have just picked up. Do you think that it just grew that way and that you picked it up in a garden? Look at its delicate hexagonal shaft, the daintily threaded style of the metal collar holding the eraser, and above all at the pleasing yellow color coating the pencil. An ordinary piece of lead

enclosed in a stubby piece of wood might answer your purposes, but I am quite sure that you would, if asked to make a choice between it and the yellow pencil, immediately choose the one you are holding. A designer, perhaps several designers, created that pencil—to please your esthetic desire. They were artists in their own line.

“Now look at your handkerchief with its subtle weaving and embroidery. Look at the chair you are sitting on. Are not these creations for your comfort all the more worthy for being attractive to the eye? All of these are, in fact, artistic efforts. Now look out of your window and see those buildings, the motor cars, the distant park and—if you can from this altitude—glimpse the attractive display windows of the stores. All this, even from the street hydrant to the church tower, required the talent of artist-creators. It may be food, shelter, clothing, the monumental edifice or that inconsequential pencil in your hand—each has had its creator, who had the artist in him, more or less. There is art in every branch of human endeavor, but most of us do not stop to think of this. Yet, as a matter of fact, art is one of the dominating forces in human life.”

My listener had native intelligence, and he conceded the logic of my argument. Had his education included a larger element of culture in the best sense of the word, he might well have been attuned to the arts. But his college education had been mainly utilitarian and had omitted the arts. Without the arts, it had been a flavorless set of courses and had not given that finesse in the art of living that is so important. (I may say, by the way, that I did not praise or defend his relative's art perception in the purchase of the Old Master, for that would only have resulted in a dissertation on art that might have been over the head of my listener.)

Some time after this encounter took place, I was delighted to read in *The New York Times Magazine* for February 21, 1943, an article by James Bryant Conant, President of

Harvard University, which was entitled *No Retreat for the Liberal Arts*. It had to do with the survival of the liberal arts in wartime, and I was delighted with it because it corroborated my own feeling on this question. In part Dr. Conant said:

"I use the words general education advisedly, for it seems to me much more descriptive of the process with which we must be concerned than such phrases as liberal arts curriculum. A general education is something apart from a specialized vocational or professional training. It is, if you will, education for citizenship or education of the whole man as distinct from the development of certain skills or the acquirement of certain knowledge. It concerns 'that which is left after all that has been learned has been forgotten.'

"To my mind, the core of such a general education is the liberal and humane tradition as it has come down to us through our schools and colleges. The issue is not between general information and specialized knowledge. The cure for the disease of 'knowing more and more about less and less' does not lie in glorifying a little knowledge about a multitude of things. No one wishes to disparage the importance of being well informed. But even a man who speaks several languages and has a good educational background in mathematics and several sciences cannot be considered to be properly educated as a citizen of a free nation. For an educational program which includes no art, no literature, no history, no philosophy lacks the vital elements."

Colleges and knowledge are important, but we must remember that a university education is only a stepping stone to the broader fields of human endeavor. A college graduate, even if he has attained the highest scholastic, athletic and social honors of the campus, will still have only the hollow sound of a counterfeit coin if he has not imbibed the spirit of arts and letters and philosophy during his education. He will lack the true tone of culture and refinement. Let

me make an emphatic statement on this point. I cannot conceive of a person whose sensitivities to the arts have been cultivated deliberately plotting diabolical crimes. Only through some temporary obsession could such a person do so. In one of my essays I have said that education by itself may sometimes place dangerous weapons in the hands of perverted or misanthropic persons like the Propaganda Minister of Nazi Germany, the mentally distorted Joseph Goebbels. I doubt whether the message of art has ever touched his soul or the souls of those of his kind.

One point I should drive home here is that mere information about art is of slight cultural value. Some people think that they are appreciators of art when they are able to identify a painter or place a correct title to a piece of music or recall some passage from it, or can memorize a stanza from a poem or a paragraph from Plato. To this they add some knowledge of dates and historical background. But memory is not enough. Memory is a tool of education; it is not education itself. Education consists in absorbing the spirit of a great artist or composer or philosopher; it consists in apprehending the great man's message and making it part of oneself. When a person has done that, he truly spreads enlightenment and civilized values about him. It can be readily understood from what I have just said that I do not attach much importance to the dissecting type of criticism. When critics dissect a piece of art or music, isolate its "architectural form" or its "significant form," stress color alone, or arrangement alone, or esthetic technique alone, then the entire combination slips away from them; all elements are important to the whole of a painting just as melody, form and harmony are important to the whole of a musical composition. But these dissecting critics isolate themselves from the artist's whole message. They perform a material analysis and do not succeed in gaining an esthetic perception of the *tout ensemble*.

Frequently, however, people, impelled perhaps by a sense

of cultural inferiority, have told me that some of the world's leading thinkers and benefactors have lacked cultural education. My reply has always been that such exceptions have been endowed by heritage with the character and compassion which we expect music and art to inculcate in less fortunately endowed persons. I think of a rare Cremona violin which even unplayed is great in itself. But how much greater it is when it fulfills its purpose and its tones are brought forth! So it might be with these exceptional people; as instruments of human greatness, they might have reached greater heights of accomplishment if they had been attuned to a noble culture. I believe that the heart and mind of the great liberal Thomas Jefferson were made compassionate by his love of music; I even think that the spiritual glow which emanates from the Bill of Rights he formulated might be traceable to the freedom-loving spirit of music in him. Those great men who have not understood the language of music and art have missed something that is without price.

Recently I was reading Thomas Huxley's *Autobiography and Essays* and gained amusement from an address on *A Liberal Education* which Huxley gave in 1868. "There seems no escape," he wrote, "from the admission that what we fondly call our great seats of learning (Cambridge and Oxford) are simply 'boarding schools for bigger boys; that learned men are not more numerous in them than out of them; that the advancement of knowledge is not the object of fellows of colleges; that, in the philosophic calm and meditative stillness of their greenswarded courts, philosophy does not thrive, and meditation bears few fruits.'"

Well, Huxley said that only three years after our Civil War and just as what was called the Golden Day in American Letters was closing. In that period we had a considerable array of great minds, artists and literary figures in America. To mention a few, there were Poe, Whitman, Emerson, Audubon, Agassiz, Winslow Homer, George Inness, William James, Samuel Morse, Emily Dickinson, Har-

riet Beecher Stowe. Some had come to the summit of their powers; others were growing up. Yet British culture was superior to ours; in spite of this Huxley lamented its weaknesses. What shall be said of the present state of culture in America? Perhaps my hope for the future is a better answer. But I must say a word of gratitude for our advancement in the musical sphere which I attribute to radio and the fine work it has done in encouraging a taste for fine music. True, the major programs still cling to bad music and "crooning," but I am sure that these will die a natural death as cultural education enabling people to distinguish between the good and the bad goes forward. It is fallacious to think that some people "dislike" the music of the classics or the art of the great masters. In most cases this "dislike" is nothing else but a lack of development and association with the fine arts. The receptivity of people for these arts is in most cases present, but it has been dulled by lack of encouragement and an unfavorable environment. In my essay entitled *A Glance at Esthetics*, I gave a factual example of this.

Now I would like to put in a word for hero-worship. History as it is taught to school children seems to me very unsatisfactory. A subject covering wars, physical, political, scientific, economic and other changes is far more suited to mature minds than to the minds of elementary school children. Elsewhere in this book I told of the effect upon me of the picture of Socrates being offered a cup of hemlock which illustrated my juvenile classroom reader. All my teacher told us was that it showed the cruelty of capital punishment in ancient times. Torturing children with this, to them, incomprehensible story seems to me a pointed example of faulty education. To my mind, history should be taught in an honest straightforward manner to mature pupils, who have acquired the capacity to grasp its significances. But it is an error to teach it to children of impressionable age, who

are endowed by Nature with the instincts of the fox, tiger, snake and monkey.

Children cannot grasp the causes of wars, which are often the results of political intrigues; they are therefore given pseudo-historical facts heavily coated with patriotism. As a child I was taught the story of our wars, but it was not until later years that I learned anything about their true significance. Although true patriotism is commendable, one should while shielding his mother have due regard for his neighbor. This is where I think hero-worship should come in. Would it not be preferable to teach children the hero-worship of great men and women in science, music, literature, art and other humane endeavors? Give them the story of a great explorer or a great scientist who has made tremendous sacrifices, or the story of a poet or artist or musician who was inspired by Nature, with actual examples of their work shown in classroom or on trips to museums. Above all, do not tax the child's mentality but make his mind flexible and agile by means of interesting mental games, as I have urged on other occasions.

When history is taught in the higher institutions of learning, the pupil can grasp the significance of a great military leader whose victories have helped to shape the modern world. I even dare to hope the day will arrive when through the refinement of the human race by true culture, military history will have taken a secondary place, and the great heroes in the textbooks of the future will be the benefactors, not the benefactors through destruction, of mankind. I trust the reader will not find my facetiousness out of place if I imagine future newspaper headlines like the following: "Boston Symphony Scores with the Fifth (Beethoven)" to balance the sports headline, "Boston Braves Lead in the Fifth"; or "Man of Science Wins National Prize" to offset the horse-racing headline, "Man o' War Wins Sweepstake."

Of one thing I am sure, religion and art should not be divorced in our temples of worship. To judge from the



unceasing wars that have plagued humanity, religion alone has made little progress over the centuries in developing a controlling ethical sense in man. True, in some instances religion has served as a deterrent to crime, and many times it has been a solace and comfort to men in distress. But religion alone is not enough. It needs the aid of art to soften the stony heart of man. A welfare worker of long experience once told me that he had observed on criminals a distinct softening effect wrought by listening to good music; some of them were decidedly more moved than by sermons. "Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast." Let us remember that some of the world's finest music and greatest art had its inception in the church and that religion and art were of old intimately associated.

Art and music spring from a natural impulse in man. Nature is the inspiration of human thought. She creates, and we are part of her; therefore, the creative arts are great assets to humanity. Man is born to express himself in song or dance, to give vent to his joy or sorrow, whether he be savage or civilized. Likewise he adorns himself according to his command over his material environment. Even in the lower strata of the animal kingdom, color and sound are of vital importance. The gaily colored plumage of the bird, the trill of the nightingale, the cooing of the dove, the spring peeping of the frog—all these have their magic in their spheres. And they appeal magically to civilized men, to musicians and artists and poets; they have been a stimulus and an inspiration to Keats and Schubert, to Shakespeare and Raphael.

We know that from time immemorial man has loved to adorn himself, and the crudest savages spend much of their time on artistic trifling which gives them pleasure. Their creations, while unesthetic by many of our criteria, nevertheless possess some rhythmic expression in harmony with their character. Imitation, traceable to the ape, is man's natural impulse. Imitation is not the result of culture alone, but a

fundamental human trait, a fact that is obvious in children. Plato decried art because in his time he considered it a mere mimicry of Nature; perhaps the artists of his day, like many of those of the present, operated mainly on the ape-like instinct of imitation. It may be that in the future mimicry in the arts will disappear and artists will create solely by their imagination, and not be pinned down to copying Nature and objects. To Plato art was an illusion, although to Aristotle it was real; perhaps Plato was unduly influenced by the Socratic monotheistic doctrine of Hebraic origin: "Thou shalt not worship any graven image." This perhaps meant: "Thou shalt not duplicate or imitate Nature."

Very recently I came across a striking instance of the necessity of art. I was leafing through a current periodical and came upon a picture of a soldier's dugout on one of the warring fronts. In this dismal shelter, this soldier had decorated the "walls" with some bits of cloth (tapestries to him in his wretched surroundings), a few photographs and magazine cut-outs, and some other bits of adornment. Why did he do it? It was because he felt a warming spirit induced by these decorations. They reminded him of the handiwork of people; they were a reminiscence of peaceful days. The effect was certainly not great art and perhaps the soldier was no art connoisseur, but the human appetite for visual gratification, no matter how humble, was active in him. Even under campaign conditions, art proves to be a necessity.

Here is another striking bit of evidence. According to the *New York World-Telegram* (February 4, 1943), the American Red Cross issued a call for skilled artists and craftsmen to aid in the rehabilitation of injured soldiers and sailors. It has been demonstrated in civilian hospitals that the use of arts and crafts has had a major therapeutic effect in the treatment of mental and physical cases. And almost daily I hear on the radio requests for music records to be sent to our armed forces. One such moving request was made by the noted composer Deems Taylor during the inter-

mission of the Philharmonic Symphony concert; he supplied testimony from soldiers' letters that fine music was appreciated on the war front.

Some people do not realize that there is even art in science. A celebrated surgeon of my acquaintance who is also an art connoisseur uses the word "beautiful" in a purely artistic sense when he describes skill in sealing the incisions of an appendectomy. One proud orthopedic surgeon places his initials on the casts he fashions for his patients. Other examples could be given. The reader will observe that in showing the necessity of art, I am not touching on the higher arts. I began with a simple utilitarian pencil and I have been showing how art pervades savage life, the battlefield, hospitals, science and other fields where one is apt to overlook its presence if one takes only a superficial view. When we begin to appreciate the lofty creations of a Giotto, a Botticelli, a Rembrandt and to enjoy the music of a Bach, a Beethoven, a Wagner, and to love the words of Plato, Aristotle, Kant and Shakespeare, then we begin to breathe on the highest plateau of human understanding and are filled with enthusiasm to spread the gospel of the liberal arts to others.

Economically, art appeals to many as an investment. In these war years we have witnessed the special economic appeal it holds for Hermann Goering. Recently this big vandal who dares to call himself a "humanist" was presented by the Vichy Government, cowering beneath the might of Goering's Luftwaffe, with the famous altar piece of the Van Eyck brothers which adorned Ghent cathedral for centuries. The Belgians had sent it to France for safekeeping, but the Nazis overran France, and the greedy Goering cast his eye on it. His act of robbery enraged the civilized world and made it kin. Even those who were not familiar with the work of the great masters experienced a heart-pang. It should be noted that the loss was not felt so much in terms of money as it was in a realization of the spiritual depriva-

tion it meant to the community that loved the altar piece. Just imagine if our enemies robbed us of some work dear to the nation such as the George Washington Athenaeum portrait by Gilbert Stuart or even of a lesser creation, a piece of silverware by Paul Revere. Would not our sentiment and pride in the creative powers of our forebears be more affected than if our banks were plundered of their gold? We may prate of the power of money, but subconsciously we know that money is only the shadow, not the substance, of man's creativity. We may not realize it but beneath our conscious minds we adore creation.

I trust that I am not giving the impression that I wish to reform mankind and remake all human beings into professional artists, musicians, poets or philosophers. I am not so foolish as to want that done. My wish is simply that the arts come to have a greater sway and that they be used to isolate the *Bacillus Belli*. They have a mission to perform for peace, and I would forward that mission. Plato, severe critic as he was of the arts, said this on one art: "Fine music will strengthen human character."

We are in the midst of a war, and who knows how long the road is to peace? Yet in the midst of total war, we hear about many plans for a post-war world. At the peace table there will sit again the industrialist, the financier, the military man, the statesman, all pondering new world planning. Should there not be included the artist? Do we not need the post-war ideas and ideals of the poet and the musician? Let us cherish the hope that some among the statesmen and financiers will have been imbued with the spiritual quality of music, art and poetry, the instruments that tame the fiercer passions of mankind, and that led by this quality they will sincerely try to eradicate in the peace settlement the possibility of a return of the ugliness and futility of war.

Having, I hope, somehow convinced the reader of the importance of art in our world, I must now add a mundane postscript to the effect that artists cannot live on glory alone.

They need the material as well as the moral support of the world. I hope that no reader of mine has been lulled into the erroneous belief that all the great artists starved in desolate garrets and that it was hunger and privation that spurred them to produce masterpieces. Many people do not know that for whole epochs great artists were subsidized. At one time the Church subsidized them; during the Renaissance the Popes and princes subsidized them. Titian, Rubens, Velasquez and Van Dyck had their kings and nobles to support them, and the artists of the reigns of Louis XIV and Louis XV and of Marie Antoinette's day suffered no privation during their stay in the royal households. And so on through the centuries to the present.

This does not deny that there has been many an artist who has suffered a good deal of economic insecurity, but the point must be made that their inspirations came only during their intervals of physical and mental alleviation, not to mention their spells of monetary relief. A true artist is happy in the most humble surroundings if he has enough to get by. Social recognition may flatter him temporarily, but his ear will always be strained to catch the plaudits of true intelligent appreciation.

One thing I have not got: a blueprint for an artist's Utopia. People must first be educated to the need for the arts. When the public can stand on its own feet and not borrow its judgment from the professional critic, the true artist in music, literature or painting will not be long neglected, and time will be accelerated in its decision. Will a government subsidy of the arts help? Somewhat, if politics and favoritism can be eliminated. But until the heightening of cultural education for our communities takes place, the artist will have to take his chances and wait for time, the ultimate critic and judge.

A last word. Whatever I may have said in adverse criticism of some of the contemporary trends in art, discussed in earlier chapters, should not convey the idea that I

am against innovations in art. We need the courage of youth in art no less than we need the wisdom and lessons of the Old Masters. Many momentous changes are taking place in the world, and I am finishing this last chapter while big battles rage all over the world. Humanity is steeped in blood, and some appalled by this have suggested that we curtail the arts by closing our museums and universities for the duration. If such an action could materially hasten the end of the carnage, I would raise all the clamor I could for it. But I do not think so.

So let us hold indomitably to our thread of culture, even as the brave defenders of Stalingrad held to their ground; for once the strand of culture breaks, it takes generations to mend it. Our men and women now serving on ugly war fronts will one day come back to us parched and starved for beauty. We must keep faith and be prepared to hand them this thread intact, that they may continue to weave the alluring warming mantle of civilization and culture.

In closing I crave the reader's consent to inscribe a bit of verse that I have long treasured; it is a quatrain by Lander:

*I strove with none, for none was worth my strife;  
Nature I loved, and next to Nature, Art;  
I warmed both hands before the fire of life,  
It sinks, and I am ready to depart.*



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